

Earnestly Yours by orphan_account

Series: [In Your Veins \[1\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Billy Hargrove's Mother, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Kali Prasad, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Original Female Character(s), Original Male Character(s), Scott Clarke, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Parents, Susan Hargrove, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove & Original Male Character(s), Billy Hargrove/Original Female Character(s), Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Eleven | Jane Hopper & Billy Hargrove, Jonathan Byers & Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Neil Hargrove/Susan Hargrove, Past Billy Hargrove/Original Male Character(s), Past Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler - Relationship, Steve Harrington & Dustin Henderson, Steve Harrington & Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

As the Upside Down makes a shocking resurgence, Billy and Steve navigate a heartbreaking relationship that seems fated to end before it even really begins.

1. "Do You Know Who You Are?"

Author's Note:

Each chapter of this story is inspired by lyrics of a favorite song writer of mine, Keaton Henson , these lyrics can be found here -> <http://muse--memes.tumblr.com/post/132782914076/keaton-henson-sentence-starters>
Enjoy. :3

“Man, why are you even here?” Steve says exasperated as he picks up the cardboard sign and drags it over to the other side of the gym. Billy watches him go, a small minuscule part of him wanting to go and help him, but the other part, the large angry part only smirks at his discomfort with the weight and crosses his arms over his chest. If anyone were to witness this exchange they might think that Billy was staring at Steve’s ass and they would be right, not that he would ever admit it to anyone.

“Maxine forced me to come.” Billy spits out as he turns slightly away from the view of Steve’s backside and to the table where the punch bowl still stands, smelling more like whiskey than juice. It’s an all too familiar stench and he wrinkles his nose slightly as he picks up the punch spoon curiously before dropping it. He raises his eyebrows as if to say, ‘really?’ These middle schoolers aren’t even in high school yet. But they will be soon, one more year. Ninth graders and then off to the big HS or as he likes to call it the big BS. Good thing he’ll be gone by the time that rolls around. He won’t have to see those annoying little shits.

“She forced you?” Steve asks incredulously, his eyebrows raised showing off the now purple tint of the bruises nicely. Billy flinches inside, not showing of course how he’s really feeling on the outside, but he still feels a stab of guilt for what he did to King Steve. He did deserve a little beating, but maybe this was excessive, maybe he did go too far. But to be fair to himself, Steve should know how to take a beating, he’s a man isn’t he?

“Yeah, that little shit had a bat to the jewels. She keeps a switch

blade with her at all times now.” Billy explains. Steve looks a little taken aback, but not overly so, more confused than anything. “And she threatened you again?”

“Fucking bitch- She said she would sneak into my bed and cut them off. Now I think, ‘you what she’s a kid, they always say shit they don’t mean.’ But then one night she wakes me up, on my bed, and I’m thinking who the fuck taught her this? King Steve maybe? Did have her all night. But then this little shit pulls out the switch blade and holds it real close and says I have to apologize to you. Something about the one with the fucked up teeth bugging the Sinclair kid.”

“Hey! Don’t fucking talk about him like that! His names Dustin. Wait- She did that?”

“It’s not fucking funny Harrington!” Billy yells as Steve laughs, and seeing him smile like that, be happy makes a smirk almost make its way onto his face. He shouldn’t have told him that, he never says more than is needed, a habit he gained after so many years with Neil, but something about Steve leaves him so open and raw. Words just come out with him around. He realizes this now in the middle schooler gymnasium as Steve laughs his ass off at the picture of a thirteen year old almost cutting his most prized possession off. Only backing down after Billy agrees to apologize to Steve. Their nanny or whatever. It’s fucked up, but Billy really wants another go at Steve in this exact moment. To punch that fucking grin off of his face, while the other half of him wants to laugh with him. He doesn’t know what to fucking do, so in the end he says, “Just fucking accept the apology so I can get the hell out of here... Why the fuck are you cleaning up the gym anyway?”

Steve stands up, smiling still as he wipes the tears of laughter away from his eyes. “Uhh... Dustin was supposed to do it so I offered to help. I didn’t have anything better to do but then something came up with the gang.”

“So what you’re doing this for free? On a Saturday morning? What the fuck is wrong with you Harrington?”

“Hell no, I’m not doing it for free. He’s going to help clean my house tomorrow.” Steve tells him.

“Won’t your parents be pissed that someone else is helping you with your chores?”

It was such an odd statement to be coming out of Billy, for Steve anyway, but he ignores that weird tugging in the bottom of his stomach and says, “Nah, they don’t care. Off on a business trip.”

Billy eyes Steve, sensing something else from the guy, but decides to ignore it. It’s not his fucking business and why the fuck would he care anyway? He’s no Nancy Wheeler who asks about feelings and shit. Instead he pulls out his pack of cigarettes and lights one up. He blows the smoke in Steve’s direction and Steve smiles slightly, nodding his head as he sees where this is going, the flashes of Billy punching the shit out of him still fresh in his mind.

“Alright fine, I forgive you, alright? Now can you leave so I can finish this already?”

“You forgive me, huh?” Billy says in between puffs. He knows Steve is only saying it because he wants Billy out of his precious hair, but Billy really wants it to be real. He doesn’t acknowledge this consciously, the feeling is what he understands. It tugs in his heart along with some long lost memory in his head, but he pushes them both down and goes with what he knows. “You’ll tell Maxine then? She won’t fucking believe me.”

“Yeah, I’ll tell Max.” Steve says as he already starts to get back to cleaning up the dance.

Billy shifts his weight from foot to foot, struggling with something before he puts out the smoke in the last bit of punch, now just straight whiskey with a hint of juice and walks over to where Steve has picked up the sign again. He grabs the other end and Steve immediately looks back at him. There’s suspicion and a hint of apprehension as he asks, “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like? Carrying the sign to the trash.” Billy says matter of fact.

“You’re helping me...”

Billy doesn't say anything at first then, "Yeah and?"

"Why..." Steve's eyebrows pinch up into confusion and if Billy was some girl he would think that as cute. "Do you know who you are?"

"Did I hit your head too hard Harrington? Of course I know who I fucking am."

"Yeah you're the guy who the beat the shit out of me. So why are you helping me."

"It's not for you, it's for me, okay? Max won't believe you about forgiving me unless it's true. So I'm helping you and then we're even. Got it?"

"This is all for your dick?" Steve asks a funny expression on his face.

"Yes, it is. It's an impressive piece of meat, you want to see?" Billy says, almost seductively, his tongue curling around his lip but still with some humour in his tone that dies out as his eyes lock with Steve's.

Steve stares back at him, an unreadable look on his face and then there's a moment that passes between them. The air is thick, not just with the smoke from Billy's cigarette that was once lighted, but with something else. A small subtle moment that Steve can't even explain, that Billy will choose to ignore ever happened as Steve says, "Fuck off, man."

Steve turns and takes the front end of the sign as Billy takes the back, smirking at the view now in front of him.

"Nice jeans, Harrington."

Steve turns his head to him, glaring. "Fuck off, Hargrove," He says, thinking it's some kind of insult before looking forward again as they walk. Billy smirks at his anger and frustration of him as he stares at his retreating form.

'This will be fun.' Is Billy thinks before he picks up his pace to match Steve's as they hold the sign together, making their way outside.

“So how was Wheeler in bed? I bet you’re the one that popped her cherry, huh?” Billy says with a smirk.

Steve stops in his tracks, turning around to glare at him and yell. When he does Billy smirks, because it’s everything.

2. "Do You Know Your Lip Shakes When You're Mad?"

Notes for the Chapter:

I know these prompts say 'sentence starters' but I'm more writing around them and going with the flow than beginning with them. Sorry if the characters are ooc, I'm doing the best I can. Any and all feedback is welcome! Please do leave comments, they encourage me to keep writing. <3

"Steve! Steve! Come in Steve! This is an emergency! Steve, what are you doing?" Dustin's voice yells through the walky-talky a little muffled through static and the clothing that's piled on top of the device. It takes a couple of minutes before Steve really registers the noise, his head completely immersed in trigonometry. It's his senior year and if he doesn't get this shit done and done well he's not going to any college, not that he was planning on it anyway. When he was with Nancy she assumed he was, helping him prep and study, but now she's with Jonathan and Steve is left alone to make his own future. A future he's not even sure of, he's never been good at this school shit. The only one really pushing him to go to college is his dad every couple of months when he bothers to stop in. His mom's in Paris, he hasn't seen her in over a year. He never told Nancy that, he's never told anyone that.

"Jesus! Would you calm down!?" Steve says into the speaker. "I'm trying to study for a Trig test here."

"Steve!? Oh my god, thank god, I'm so glad that you picked up, you will not believe what is going on right now." Dustin blabs out in one go.

Steve sighs. "I'm sure that I will." After all, Dustin is constantly calling him over this thing with new information and updates on everything, not that Steve doesn't mind, it's not like he can really go over to the Byers to see what's new. Well, he could, he just chooses not to. And he does like talking to Dustin but he really needs to study and he's not always up for his antics. Maybe he's become bitterer for the past month. But can anyone really blame him? The girl he loves

doesn't love him and now she's with the only real friend he had, which is sad in itself. Not that he doesn't like Jonathan, he's okay, but in the fact that he really doesn't have anyone else. Only these kids. And *him*, but he doesn't really count does he?

"Billy is at the diner with us! I repeat, Billy is at the diner with us!" Dustin yells out. Speak of the Devil. "And I think it's really shady because he keeps smirking at Max and getting mad at her when she says she wants to leave or one of us wants to leave. I mean- What is his angle? I had to fight to get out of my chair!"

"What!? Slow down, Dustin, he wouldn't let you go to the bathroom?"

"What no! I mean, yes, but no he said I had to be out in ten minutes or he's coming in. But that's just weird isn't it? What's his angle? Maybe he's another spy! Steve you got to get over here an- and bring that bat!"

Just as abruptly as his voice was coming through, it's gone. Steve holds it up, pressing the button on the side, "Dustin! Dustin! Shit." He throws the walky-talky onto his bed in frustration as he picks up his jacket from the pile of clothes and puts it on. A quick fix of the hair in the mirror and he's out the door. Dustin is probably overreacting, Billy isn't really going to hurt them, is he? He wouldn't. Truth is he doesn't really know what Billy is capable of, he thinks as he drives through the bumpy road onto the main drag and toward town. He lives about a mile away with the diner being a few blocks into town. It gives just enough time for him to completely freak out.

After what happened under the middle school bleachers on that Saturday and all the times after, Steve had seen Billy in a different light. Not like he's some angel, because Steve knows better, but maybe, just maybe underneath all of that there's something more. Something else. He's been good with the kids, he hasn't hassled them or done anything. He even apologized to Lucas a week after he apologized to him. He drove Max to school and home, to the arcade, and sometimes to the boys or Jane's. He didn't say anything, or do anything except to whisper to him to meet up later when everyone was out of sight when they both happened to be dropping off kids at the same time somewhere. Hell, he didn't even trip him in basketball

anymore, just a couple light shoves to remind him to plant his feet but that's all. So why the fuck is he in the diner with them making Dustin so paranoid that he's calling him from the bathroom on his walky-talky?

Steve grips the steering wheel tightly as he pulls into the diner parking lot. It's dark out, making the light coming from the diner's massive windows all that much more visible. Inside the only patrons there are Billy, indeed sitting at a table with all of the kids gathered around. Dustin is arguing with him it seems, while Jane is glaring at Dustin. Maxine is glaring at Billy with her arms folded across her chest. Mike seems unsure while Lucas seems pissed. Will is trying to make himself as small as possible while at the same time sticking his chin up like he will jump in if he needs to. This cannot be good, is Steve's final thought before he opens the diner door, the bells jingling from above. The noise rushes at him as he makes his way to the table.

"Look, we all know you're evil and that you're sorry, so can we please go?" Dustin says.

"No." Billy responds. "Not until after you eat, you ungrateful little shits."

"What the hell is going on?" Steve asks his hands unconsciously finding themselves on his hips as he walks up to their table.

"You said you didn't call him." Billy sneers at Dustin after a brief glance to Steve.

The one waitress who is working, Janis looks between all of them a little afraid. Steve nods his head to her as if to 'I'll take care of this.' She gives a grateful glance to him and makes her way back to the kitchen as Steve turns back to the kids and Billy.

"I said what the hell is going on here!?" He's angry now, making everyone stop talking, even Billy although it looks like he wants to say something as he lights a cigarette and blows the smoke in Steve's general direction.

"Billy won't let us leave until we eat all of this food he bought us. In

other words he's being an asshole again." Max says before Dustin can say anything.

"Shut your fucking mouth, Maxine." Billy says, but she only rolls her eyes, his threats empty to her now after the incident with the switch blade.

"Billy wants to help." Jane says, her plate the only one that is almost empty as she continues to munch on some garlic bread. She seems a little unsure of the tension between them all, but she doesn't shy away from Billy like most of the kids around the table.

Steve sighs, looking around at them all before his eyes come to Billy's who is conveniently not looking at him. Steve rubs his hands down his face before he takes a deep breath and grabs Billy's arm. There's a subtle movement where Billy flinches, but Steve ignores it as he pulls him up and out of the diner seat. Billy could easily rip out of his grip, but he doesn't, instead he follows after Steve out of the diner.

"Stay here!" Steve calls out behind him to the kids before dragging Billy onto the street. "What- What the hell are you doing, man?"

"I was buying the dickheads food." He says it like Steve's stupid. It rubs Steve the wrong way.

"No shit, but why is Dustin calling me on this stupid walky-talky saying you're being an asshole? Not letting them leave the table?"

"It's called being polite. Maybe you should be teaching your kid some manners."

"He's not my- Or for fu-" Steve says his hands in his hair with frustration and anger.

Billy smirks at Steve. "Do you know your lips shake when you're mad?"

Steve looks at him, not even knowing what to say to that before deciding on, "I'm taking the kids home. It's already passed their curfew."

“And then?” Billy asks, taking a step closer to Steve, the air between them changing into something else.

“And then what?” Steve says almost softly, the anger almost gone, replaced with something more primal.

“I don’t know. You tell me, Harrington.”

“You’re a fucking asshole.”

“But you like it.” Billy retorts.

“Fuck off. I’ll meet you at the usual place.” Steve says, rolling his eyes at Billy’s antics. “Are you taking Max home?”

“Yeah, I’ll take the little shit home.” Billy says, taking a step back as they both snap out of the moment.

Steve nods his head, a little exasperated but more in a playful way before he heads to the diner door where the kids are not so discreetly running back to their places at the diner’s table. Steve’s knows they didn’t hear anything when he walks in and they aren’t shocked or asking questions. Later, when he’s taking Dustin home and he doesn’t ask about it, he knows for sure they didn’t hear anything, and that makes him breathe a sigh of relief but he can’t help feel a small twinge of disappointment too.

3. "You Don't Like To Be Touched, Let Alone Kissed."

Notes for the Chapter:

Feedback is always welcome! <3

“Fuck, Harrington.” Billy says breathlessly as Steve rolls off of him and lays on his back, he too breathes heavily. There’s heat between them, both slick with sweat and other bodily fluids. Billy is already lighting up another cigarette as Steve stares up to his ceiling. Usually they fuck outside, at a place they found in the woods, but slowly but surely Steve convinced Billy it would be better at his house. That no his parents aren’t there and no they won’t just show up. His father always calls first, and his mother, she hasn’t been back here in over a year.

Steve chuckles. “Thanks.”

Billy smirks as he drags in a puff of the sweet nicotine. “Cocky today, are we?”

“Fuck you.” Steve says all smiles now. Usually Billy is gone right after, driving off and leaving the dirt treading behind him, but not tonight. He lays beside Steve, smoking and this is something Steve’s wanted for a long time, but for the life of him, he doesn’t know what to say. Then again when has he ever? He’s better at the physical, gestures of sincerity not woven together in words but objects and touch. What they represent and mean. So when he reaches out to touch Billy’s shoulder and he flinches away like he’s been burned, Steve flinches too.

“What? You think I’m going to hit you again?” Billy says, all snarl and snark as he sits up, but there’s a hurt there underneath it all that Steve can only hedge at.

“No, it’s just-” Steve starts to say as he to sits up, then stops himself. He should have known better, he shouldn’t have pushed. He’s not stupid despite what everyone probably thinks, he sees the way Billy shies away from touch. The way he never gets close. How he takes off as soon as the deed is done. How when they’re fucking, it’s all rough

grip and no more necessary contact than needed. But then Billy stayed. He was lying beside him and Steve really saw him. Covered in sweat and their seed, he has never looked more beautiful. He just wanted to reach out and let him know that he's here. Fuck, he doesn't know what he was thinking.

"It's just what, Harrington?" And it's louder than ever. The afterglow they were basking in for only a few short and sweet moments is gone. Gone from his voice, from his stance, there is no more joking in his tone.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean- I know you don't like to be touched." Steve says, then thinking back to all the times he's tried to innatate contact, to the times he's not so subtly tried to kiss him, and having Billy pull away, he says softly, "Let alone kissed."

There's some kind of expression on Billy's face for the briefest of moments that Steve can't quite place before the anger is back and then a hurtfulness toward him that comes pouring out. "I'm sorry, King Steve, did I not treat you right? What do you think we are, huh? Boyfriend and girlfriend? Some little power couple who holds hands and kisses and shit!? Fuck you! You're nothing more than a warm mouth on my dick, Harrington, nothing more. I'm no fucking Nancy Wheeler. You're just a good fuck. That's all you are to me. Do you hear me?"

He's in his face now but Steve isn't scared. He's hurt, which is stupid because he knew what he was getting into with Billy. They were fooling around, the first time Billy said to him, it was in a joking tone but his words rung true honesty, 'now don't fall in love with me, Harrington.' Steve told him to fuck off before they rubbed one out together under the bleachers. Of course he wouldn't fall in love with him, who would ever fall in love with Billy Hargrove? Certainly not him, it was just a way to let go of some pent up emotions. It was just a good fuck then, at the time. Steve knows like he knew then that a good fuck is all it can be, but now staring into Billy's angry eyes he feels a small pull in his gut. An ache in his chest that tells him he is so fucking screwed, because he cares. It's not even close to fucking being 'in love' but it's dark and angry and he never wants to hurt Billy even though he's hurt him so much. He just wants him to not have those angry lines on his face, he doesn't want to be the one who

puts them there ever. He just wants to touch, to really feel him, and show him that he cares even if he doesn't care about him. It's confusing and messed up, but *fuck*.

Steve swallows back the wave of emotions and says, "I hear you."

Billy smirks but it doesn't reach his eyes, there's something cold and distant. Something angry and sad all in one and Steve can't help but reach out. His intention is to touch Billy's face gently, or at least get as far to him as he can, but his hand barely makes it to the smoothness of skin before Billy grabs it. His grip on Steve's hand is blinding as he looks down to the ground, all coldness and calm gone from his face, and then he says, voice thick with emotion, "Don't."

It's like Billy's been undone. He's so raw and almost vulnerable. It's like his walls have been temporally broken down. It leaves Steve's chest aching and his lips down turned into a frown as he slowly moves the hand in Billy's so that it's holding on, holding onto Billy. He squeezes and rubs his thumb gently along his knuckles as best as he can in the killer grip. Billy loosens his hold slightly so that Steve can continue the gentle caress of his thumb along Billy's skin. It lasts a few long burning seconds, where Billy continues to stare at the carpet, almost in shock while Steve burrows his eyes into Billy's. It's almost like they are frozen in time for the shortest and longest minutes to ever be.

Then, just as it happens, the moment is gone. Billy slips his hand out of Steve's, almost gently but quickly at the same time. He stands up, straightening his stance, and without looking at Steve says, "I have to go."

And just like that, he's gone. A half an hour later, Steve realizes he hasn't moved from his spot just yet. The burning of where Billy's hand was in his still remains.

4. "Does His Love Make Your Head Spin?"

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments are always appreciated and welcome! <3

"Okay, so your mom wants you back by eleven thirty. I'll be here fifteen before." Steve explains to Dustin who sits across from him in the driver's side already half way out the door. Usually the hang out for the kids is at Mike's but ever since what happened with the Demogorgon's and the upside down messing up Will's life once again, Joyce has insisted that they play at her place where she can keep an eye on her son at all times. Tonight was no different, and Steve was once again the resident driver for Dustin, not that he minded.

"Yes, alright! I know Steve, now can I go before Mike and Will make up hand signals again behind my back?" Dustin says hurriedly.

"Yes! Fine! Go, go."

"Thanks Steve." Dustin says it with a smile and quickly gets out of the car, but before he can slam the door shut all of the way, he stops with a contemplating expression on his face. He then turns his head to Steve, looking unsure but determined. "You can come in, Steve. It's not just us- I mean, Jonathan will be there and he's going to play to. So is Hopper but he's not playing so I mean really either way would be cool. We're going to order pizza and-"

"Nancy's there isn't she?" Steve says, looking straight ahead, a painful grimace of lips. Steve is getting over Nancy, he really is, but after everything they've been through, not just her but him and Jonathan, he can't help but still feel hurt. He can't help but still feel that sting of betrayal. Nancy wasn't just his girlfriend, she was his best friend, with Jonathan coming in at a close second. With what they did, they're now cut out of his life. He knows that was his decision but he can't see himself making any other. He trusted them both, he loved Nancy, he really did. It would hurt less if it wasn't Jonathan, it would hurt less if she really did love him once, but that's not the case, it never was.

"Come on, Steve, sh- she won't bother you. I'll make sure of it. I'll-"

"No, thanks, I have a History test Monday. Gotta study. I'll be back at fifteen to. Okay?" Steve says, still not making eye contact with his younger friend.

"Come on Steve! Look I get it, alright? Sh- she broke your heart, if anyone would understand that I-"

"Just drop it Dustin! You don't understand, okay? It's more than- It's more than her breaking up with me. She- She was my best friend."

Dustin's eyes sadden as he looks down. "I know, buddy. I'll see you at eleven thirty."

Quick as lightening he slams Steve's door making Steve look up and yell after him, "Eleven fifteen!"

Dustin turns back, thumbs up with a goofy grin. Steve can't help but let a little one slip out on his own features as he whispers to himself, "What a..." He doesn't finish what he was going to say as his eyes lock onto Nancy's. She's standing outside, no jacket on, and hands rubbing up and down her arms to try and keep warm. She locks eyes with Steve and waves. She starts to jog a little over and Steve is too stunned to say anything. She hasn't talked to him in a couple months, not since he yelled at her and told her to leave him alone. It was ugly, and he feels a little regretful about the way he said it, but when he feels that pain linger and linger day after day his guilt a bays.

She knocks on the window and motions for Steve to unlock his car door, but there's no way he's doing that, so instead he leans over and unrolls the window. He leans back as she says his name, "Steve."

"What do you want Nancy?" He asks coldly.

She seems hurt by his tone, but Steve doesn't care, she lost the right to be hurt by him after she did what she did. "Steve, please come inside. Dustin really wants you there. So do the other kids."

"I have to study."

"Steve, its Friday. Come on, we're ordering pizza. Jonathan-"

And that's what does it for him. He turns to her, eyes full of fury as he says loudly, "Does his love make your head spin? Huh, Nancy? Is the sex good? What it is that's so much better about him than me? Where you can love him in less than a month but after everything we went through it wasn't enough? Tell me Nancy! Tell me!"

She takes a step back, her eyes full of pain. "I'm sorry, Steve."

"Yeah, well, me too."

That's all the words they are able to get out before the roar of an engine cuts in between them. Nancy takes another startled step back as that familiar Camaro pulls up to the Byers place. Maxine's out the door before the car's even fully stopped. She looks pissed, but happy as she walks quickly to the house. Both Nancy and Steve watch as Billy opens his door and yells out after her, "Ten thirty Max! Not a second later!"

The Byers door slams shut and then all of Billy's focus is on Nancy, then to Steve. He stares at them as he lights a cigarette. There's a smirk but it doesn't meet his eyes as he leans over and cuts the engine. Swinging the keys in his hand he walks over to the driver's side window, placing himself in-between Nancy and Steve.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" He says. "Hmm? Cat got your tongue Wheeler? Or did your faggot boyfriend bite it off?"

"Fuck you." She says to him, then with one last lingering glance to Steve she walks up to the house and goes inside.

Steve knows she's looking through the window, making sure nothing's going to happen. Not that it would. Billy and he don't get physical in that way anymore. Besides Hopper's police car is parked a few meters from where Billy's ride is parked. He knows better than to doing anything in this position. But it's all semantics, Steve knows Billy wouldn't really hurt him, not unless he asked for it.

"So Wheeler again, huh?" He says to him. "Her pussy really that good?"

"Meet me at the usual spot. Not- Not my house." Steve grits out

through clenched teeth. Their spot in the forest is closer, he can't wait until they drive to his place. He needs Billy now, so before said teenager can say anything else Steve backs up and peels out of the Byer's. It's got all of the aggression and style of Billy Hargrove, but Steve doesn't care. And if he looks in his rear view mirror to see said young man smirking at the way he took charge, well, he'll just tell himself he doesn't care about that either, and no one will ever have to know how good it really makes him feel.

5. "It Seems As Though I'm On My Own."

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you so much to all of you who have left a comment so far! They really motivate me. I always welcome them. :) <3

"It seems as though I'm on my own." Billy says to Steve who stares at him curiously. Billy never shows up at his place, not ever. Steve knows it's because he's paranoid about his parents or anyone else showing up, despite Steve's instance that it would never happen. He's never really elaborated on it, but the truth is Steve doesn't have any friends anymore. Aside from the kids, but they always call over the walky-talky if they're going to make a "surprise" appearance. He doesn't have any siblings, and his parents are barely around. His mom, never, but his dad, he always calls. "Max is at that weird girl's house for the night, and Neil and Susan are out on some work thing."

"You mean Eleven?" Steve asks as he walks forward and sits on a step leading up to the front door. He's tired, exhausted really, baking with the kids all day really takes a toll. All of them were at his house before Hopper came to pick up the girls and Will. They were all staying at the Byers. Hopper started spending more and more days there that turned into many nights. It's the unspeakable big elephant in the room that everyone has already silently acknowledged. Jonathan always wanted another sibling, brother or sister, he didn't really care but it would be nice, he used to say. Looks like he got what he wanted with Eleven.

"I thought her name was Abbey or Jane, or some shit like that." Billy says lighting a cigarette.

"Can I have a puff?" Steve asks as he rests his head against the banister, too exhausted to correct Billy on her name and explain why she has two.

Billy gives Steve a queer look, and then hands it to him. "I thought you didn't smoke, Harrington."

"I don't." He says, taking a puff then immediately coughing all the smoke out of his lungs. Billy smirks and laughs. He takes the smoke from Steve and sits down next to him as he continues to cough. Billy takes his own, longer and more intense puff without a blink of an eye before patting Steve's back.

"Let it out, Harrington. That's the feeling of finally being a man."

"F- uck y- yo- you." Steve says through his coughing before he finally settles down, the quick intake of air finally abiding.

Billy laughs, his hand lingering on Steve's back, all hot and heavy like a weight in his family's gym that nobody ever uses. A good weight though, Steve realizes before it's swiftly removed and Billy leans back on his elbows. He stares up at the darkening sky for a few moments, smoking all the while before asking, "So what's with the cigarette, pretty boy?"

Steve glances at him briefly to gauge his facial expressions, to make sure it's not going to turn into some jab at his manhood again, or even just some teasing. He really can't handle that right now. Well he could, he just doesn't want to, he's too fucking tired. What he sees on Billy's features though is a mild curiosity with the obvious tough persona caked on extremely well. It settles calmly in Steve's chest, the way his mood seems relaxed. Maybe having his family out of the house is doing Billy some good, that's something he never thought he'd think of or feel relieved about he now realizes. He lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding, one that's probably been with him since he first met Billy and thought, 'Goddamn those eyes are pretty.'

"I wanted to relax." Steve confides, then laughs bitterly.

"What, like you're not relaxed already? A big house, no parents, or an annoying bitch of a sister. I'd kill for a setup like that."

"Hey, man, don't call Max that." Steve says for what seems like the millionth time. Only instead of Billy completely ignoring him as per usual, he gives him a look, and then with his eyes back to the sky nods his head slightly.

A few minutes of silence pass between them before Billy says, "So, what's bothering King Steve today?"

"It's stupid." Steve replies, his eyes on his socked feet. He didn't bother putting any shoes on when he heard the Camaro, figuring Billy was just going to come in for a quick fuck. He wasn't expecting this, having some kind of heart to heart with Billy Hargrove. Life really does change on a dime, like Stephan King wrote once upon a time.

"Spit it out, I don't have all day."

"I'm on my own, just like you said when you came here. I don't have a girlfriend, my best friend is a thirteen year old, which is cool because I like Dustin. He's like the little brother I never had, but I'm always alone."

"I was talking about myself." Billy says, referring to the first sentence out of Steve's mouth before taking another puff.

"Yeah." Steve says still looking down, a little disappointed. What was he expecting anyway? Billy to say he's here, with him, fuck- that is what he was- well not expecting but wanting. Hoping. He's so fucking stupid.

"Alright, enough of this sappy shit. Do you want to come over and have a few beers and other shit, or what?" Billy says standing up.

Steve looks to him then back down to the ground. This is all they'll ever have. A few beers and some messing around, for as long as Billy wants it, because let's face it he can never say no to those pretty eyes... Or mouth for that matter. "Yeah. Yeah sure. Just let me get my shoes."

Billy looks annoyed at having to wait but doesn't comment on it as Steve gets up and goes inside. He's not really feeling up to a night out with Billy, not that being around him doesn't have its perks, but he just doesn't feel right tonight. But at the very least, even if it is only for a few hours and even though Billy won't say it, he won't be alone. Besides, after a few beers and maybe a couple shots of this lovely vodka he's going to bring that he found in one of the many cupboards

in his ‘mansion’ as Billy once described, it could be a good night. He’ll finally get to see Billy’s room, something he’s been subtly asking Billy to see. Maybe he caught up on it, maybe that’s why he wants to go over to his place, after all in the few months they’ve been doing this dance, he never wanted to go over there not even when his dad was gone one weekend a couple of weeks ago. But it must be something else, Billy Hargrove doing something not for himself? Yeah, sure.

“Are you coming, Harrington!?” Billy yells after the other teenager.

“I’m coming! I’m coming! Don’t get your panties in a twist.”

6. "I'm Losing Friends."

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter took a life of it's own. But ain't that the way sometimes with writing? I hope you all enjoy!

"God, it wasn't supposed to be this way." Steve says to Billy as he rubs his hands over his face.

"What are you bitching about now Harrington?" Billy asks, resting his head against Steve's wall, a cigarette in his mouth. Unlike before there was no touching, Steve didn't even try. He likes to think he knows Billy better now, but the truth is he's learned by trial and error. The first time after Steve made that move, Billy stayed and Steve wasn't expecting that. He wasn't even expecting him to come back, but he did. They never talked about that touch, about Billy's emotion filled eyes whispering 'don't' in the darkness of Steve's room. It's like it never happened, like a dream. Now Billy stays and Steve talks, he rambles on and on and Billy listens. Steve tries to engage him but he doesn't ever say much about himself, only little things that slip out, little things that are starting to paint a better picture of Billy Hargrove.

"I'm losing friends." Steve says finally, because he is. He doesn't really have anyone he realizes more and more as he stares at the ceiling.

"You have all of those little shits on your heels."

"It's not the same."

Billy stops smoking, an odd look in his eyes. "This is about that bitch Nancy again, isn't it?"

"What?" Steve says, sitting up so he's against his wall too, his eyes meeting Billy's.

Billy lights up another one after throwing the previous into the ash tray that Steve leaves on his nightstand again. "You gotta get over

her man. Plenty of more bitches in the sea.”

His tone is less teasing and more predatory. He feels a deep frustration and anger at this girl. Steve’s told him, after one of their many ‘nights’ together. How she ditched him for the Byers’s. How she didn’t even tell him it was over, not really. How she never loved him, not once in their over one year relationship. How she fucked him over, how she was Steve’s best friend. How Jonathan was his only other one. How they rode into the sunset leaving behind Steve in the dirt.

Steve wants to tell Billy to fuck off, but then a smile graces his lips as he gets an idea. “Oh, what? You mean like you?”

He’s only joking, but before he can even say that Billy’s cigarette is in the ash tray and Steve’s arms are trapped in a bruising grip. He’s pulled down so that he’s lying on the bed with Billy staring up at him. His hands are pinned above his head and Billy has a crazy gleam in his eye that is mostly arousal.

“Did you just call me a bitch Harrington?” Billy asks nicotine breath blowing onto Steve’s, and it’s more of a turn on than ever as Billy’s knee digs slightly into his inner thigh. Steve’s dick is defiantly taking interest as he ruts slightly up against Billy who is smirking at his reaction.

“Wouldn’t be the first time.” Steve responds almost breathlessly.

They’re both shirtless, with Steve having put on his underwear and Billy having put that and his jeans back on. He was probably expecting to leave soon, whereas this was Steve’s house and he would have just fell back asleep. It made the whole scene more erotic as Steve is so fully exposed underneath Billy who has all the power over him in this exact moment. Steve starts to realize this making him smirk too.

“You gonna punish me?” Steve says up to him. “Or should I be punishing you?”

Billy gulps, that cocky look leaving his eyes.

“Billy?” Steve asks concerned. “I’m sorry I didn’t-”

“How about I ride you? Nice and deep.” Billy says, all arrogance back in his features now, but the arousal, the heavy air between them is now gone.

Steve’s concern is unnerving, making Billy let go of him and sit up on the side of the bed. Steve sits up too and lifts his hand out to Billy. His reflex is to reach out and touch him, to comfort him, but that doesn’t work with Billy. He learned that the hard way. His hand falls back down and instead he says, “I’m sorry. I won’t say that again.”

“I have to split.” Billy says in less of a response, and more of a change of subject. Steve doesn’t comment on the sudden shift of tone. “Before Neil gets back.”

“Right.” Steve says, disappointment and concern flooding his chest.

There’s an awkward moment of silence as Billy grabs his shirt off of the floor and buttons it up swiftly. He grabs his shoes from across the room and slips them on. Grabbing his jacket and keys he walks out the door, not even a backward glance at Steve who sits there still in his underwear and still with half a hard on. The cigarette in the ash tray, still smoking.

“Fuck.” Steve whispers into the dark. Why did he do that? He’s never-they’ve never- fuck. What was he thinking? And Billy’s reaction? But he doesn’t get to dwell on it for too long as his walky-talky starts cutting in. It’s mostly static as Steve opens his nightstand drawer, but it’s till annoying. His intention is to turn it off, not wanting to deal with anything else tonight. He just wants to order a pizza and sit in his big fucking ‘mansion’ and do nothing, but the words coming from the walky-talky stop him dead in his tracks.

“Demogorgon! Demogorgon!” It’s not Dustin’s voice like he was expecting, instead it sounds like Will. Or maybe Mike. It’s hard to tell through the static.

“What!?” Steve yells back into the device, pushing the buttons frantically, deep seeded fear in his chest growing. “Hello!”

“Mi- Mike’s- I- Ste-ve.” That’s when it cuts out.

“Fuck! Shit! Fuck!” Steve screams to himself as he gets his jeans on and shirt. He grabs his keys and sneakers and runs outside. He barely notices that Billy is still parked up front as he jams his keys into the door and opens up. He throws his shoes to the passenger side door and hits the gas hard.

He swears he leaves dust spurting everywhere behind him as he races down the street and into town, to the Wheeler’s house. It feels like an eternity before he’s driving up onto the grass of the front lawn and popping his trunk open. His bat is still there, ready for anything. He quickly grabs it and runs to the house. The door is wide open and fucking shit that is so not good.

He walks in slowly as soon as he notices its pitch black. He tries the light switch by the door but finds it not working. He calls out softly into the darkness for Mike or Nancy but hears nothing back. He makes his way through the coat room, then to the kitchen, then to the living room. Oh god, oh no. Mrs. Wheeler is lying on the floor, unconscious. Steve rushes to her, his grip on the bat loosening as he holds his hand to her nose checking for breathing. There’s blood on her forehead, but not other visible injuries. She must have been knocked out somehow.

“Son of a bitch.” He says in relief as he feels the faintness of oxygen being breathed in then let out.

“Steve! Watch out!” Mike yells, making Steve look up to see him at the door frame leading to the hallway.

It takes a second before Steve turns and sees what Mike is talking about. It stands there, a predatory gaze directed toward him, this creature that haunts his dreams and nightmares alike. A Demogorgon. Staring at him, tilting its head. Oh, fuck. He reaches for his bat, but it’s not there. He frantically looks around the room and sees through the ray of light from the street light outside that it’s across the room. And when the hell did he drop that? He’s so fucking stupid.

“What the hell!?”

Steve looks up to see Billy standing right at the door, a confused expression on his face, and maybe just maybe a hint of fear. This cannot get any worse. And then the Demogorgon is screeching at Billy, and yes it defiantly can. Steve doesn't even think before he dives toward the bat, coming in between the beast and Billy. He picks up the bat just as the creature runs forward. Billy seems at a loss at what to do but his body certainly isn't as he stills, bracing himself. His feet planted toward it, fists ready to throw a punch if needed, but Steve knows the Demogorgon would most likely eat his fist off before that can happen, so he acts quickly.

When the beast gets close enough Steve hits it hard. He's still on the ground, on his knees after the nose dive for his bat so it's not much force to kill. Instead it's just enough for Steve to raise to his feet and strike again. He barely has enough time before the Demogorgon is on him. He swings and swings hard, and the monster goes down. For extra measure Steve steps forward and hits a couple more times. Black goo oozes from the wounds made by the nails on the bat as it stops moving, and then so does Steve.

"Damn, Harrington, I didn't know you had it in you." Billy says staring at Steve before his eyes turn to the creature making shock and disgust fill his features. "What the fuck is that thing?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Steve responds, breathing heavily.

"Try me."

7. "I Know That There's Friction Between Me And You."

"Shh..." Steve whispers softly to the toddler in his arms as he rocks her slightly. Her eyes that are so much like Nancy's slip closed as her arms that are hanging onto his shoulders become limp. It's been a long night for her, a long night for them all he thinks as he leans back slightly in the hospital chair outside Mrs. Wheeler's room. Her husband was on a business conference a few towns away, he won't be here until later in the afternoon. He tried to get a hold of Nancy but she was off with Jonathan on some get away, he left a message at Loyd's Inn where they were staying but he hasn't heard anything back. It's less than an hour out of town but hopefully she will be here soon. It's her family after all.

"She falling asleep finally?" Billy asks from his chair next to Steve's. He helped get Mrs. Wheeler into Steve's car with Mike and himself while Will held the youngest Wheeler in his arms. She wouldn't stop crying, like she knew her mom wasn't alright, but of course she did, she's- God- She's almost five now. Time really does fly. Why Billy stayed, Steve doesn't know, but he's too freaked out to question it further. Everyone is for that matter.

Joyce had for her part dropped everything when she heard. She raced down to the hospital with Eleven and Hopper at record speed. Once she saw Will was alright as well as the other kids she breathed a sigh of relief. It took a few minutes before everyone fully understood what was going on, but when they did chaos ensued. There was a great trembling fear between them all and even more uncertainty. Hopper was in full Chief mode by that time though, spouting out orders he told Joyce, Will, Mike, and Steve to stay here. He gave a brief glance to Billy who said something snarky along the lines of, 'I ain't dying for any of you but I like Mrs. Wheeler so I'll stay until you get back.' When he was met with questioning stares he told them they had a history. With a few disgusted looks from everyone Hopper gave his final order of him and Eleven to go and check it out. Steve was in charge of checking on the other kids which he did.

They all wanted to come straight to the hospital but Max had to go

home (something Billy insisted on), and Steve knows how Dustin's mom wants him home for the night to help bake some cookies for Bridge club. Lucas just so happened to decide then and there to volunteer his services which lets him have a pass to spend the night there. All Steve could think at that moment was 'thank God it's a Friday night.' He knows Dustin will talk his ear off about how unfair it is they were sidelined for the night when he sees him again, but as long as they're safe he can deal.

"Yeah." Steve says quietly, not wanting to wake Holly. "Finally."

"Oh my God, Holly!" Steve startles as he looks up to see Nancy running toward him, Jonathan walking quickly behind her. It's record timing when she makes it to him and picks up her younger sister who is now awake. She hugs her close and pets her hair back just as Jonathan catches up looking scared. "What happened? I got your message? Where's my mom?"

"She's inside." Steve says pointing to the room. "A Demogorgon thing. Mike said it just came out of nowhere."

Nancy nods her head before opening the hospital door and walking in. Jonathan stays there looking to Steve like he wants to say something but then he glances behind him to see Billy rising out of his seat. He walks up behind Steve, an intimidating posture as a smirk lights up his face at the obvious discomfort of Jonathan's. Despite that though, Jonathan clears his throat and says, "Will's okay?"

"Yeah, he's fine. Mike got a couple scrapes, but Will's alright." Steve tells him. The air between them is tense and awkward.

"Are you sure it wasn't Hargrove here who did this." Jonathan says to Steve, side eyeing a glance at Billy. He seems nervous to say it, but Steve knows he's just trying to stick up for him. For whatever reason he's acting like he cares that Billy beat the shit out of him that one time. For whatever reason.

"Watch it, Byers." Billy practically growls as he steps forward, but a hand on his chest from Steve stops him. "Or I'll break you in two."

“Hey!” The hospital door is open then shut quickly as Joyce walks into the hallways between the boys. “Don’t you ever talk to my son like that!”

It’s not overly loud, but it rings with a protectiveness that makes Billy’s arrogance disappear. He takes a step back and says not at all sarcastically, “Sorry, M’am.”

Joyce nods then looks to her oldest. “I think Nancy needs you in there.”

Jonathan agrees easily enough and walks into the room. Once he’s gone Joyce’s full attention is on Steve and Billy. “You two go home and get some rest. Billy make sure you check on Maxine and Steve maybe swing by the Henderson’s to check on Dustin and Lucas.”

“Okay.” Steve says reluctantly then looking up, asks sadly, “Is she going to be alright?”

“Karen suffered some brain damage, the Doctor isn’t sure when she’ll wake up just yet. But she’ll be fine, you both just go rest.” Joyce says honestly before walking back into the room.

“Come on Harrington, you have to drive me to my car, remember?” Billy says grabbing Steve’s shoulder and turning him around so that they’re walking toward the exit.

“Wait! Steve?” It’s Nancy. Steve turns to look at her, she’s waiting expectantly a few meters away. Steve sighs quietly and shakes off Billy’s hand. Usually Billy would tighten his grip, but this time he lets his hand fall limply off of Harrington’s shoulder and watches as he walks over to his ex-girlfriend.

“Hey.” Steve says.

There’s obvious tear tracks, but Steve doesn’t get to ponder on it long before she pulls him into a tight hug. It’s over before Steve can reciprocate. They now stare face to face as Nancy squeezes his arm and says, “I know that there’s friction between me and you. I can’t tell you how sorry I am Steve, but I wanted to say thank you. For my mom. She might not have- Thank you for doing that for me. I

couldn't be there to protect her.”

Steve almost smiles, because for one small moment he sees his best friend again. The girl he fell in love with is there too, but she's changed. She's different, and Steve isn't so sure he likes that girl anymore. Let alone loves. His best friend on the other hand, that's another story.

“See you around, Nance.” Steve decides to say, his tone something Nancy wasn't expecting as a confusion clouds her features.

“Steve...” She says, not knowing really what she wants to say. “You and me- we were safe. But me and Jonathan we have something more. Love, passion- whatever you want to call it. I have to give it a chance because even if it ends badly I feel more alive with him than anyone I've ever known. I don't expect you to understand, but please try.”

Steve wants to tell her to fuck off. That no he doesn't get it and that no he never will, but that would be a lie. It would be a huge fucking fucked up lie. Because he does. He does, so help him God, he does get it.

“Nance...” Steve says with a quiet sob, and when did he start getting so fucking emotional? He practically falls into her arms as she hugs him close. “I- I get it. I- Billy.”

He whispers that last part, but he knows Nancy heard him as she hugs him closer. He knows she gets it, just like she gets him.

“God, Steve, I'm sorry.” She says as it all starts to make sense to her. The way they're always together now. Hanging out like best friends or something. It all makes sense, it all makes perfect fucked up sense.

When they both finally pull away and Steve turns around to head out, he really shouldn't have this big encompassing hole of disappointment and shock in his stomach when he finds that Billy is no longer standing there.

He's gone.

8. "I Know That You're Uncomfortable."

It's been an awful day and it's only Tuesday. Ever since the hospital, Billy has been ignoring Steve, and the tripping and pushing he stopped doing in basketball is back tenfold. The asshole remarks and deadly glances happen constantly throughout the day. Steve's tried to fight back, to say something witty in return but Billy only gives him a cold glare and an even colder laugh. He tries to talk to him, but it gets him nowhere. He even considered driving up to his house but Billy told him once if he ever did that he'd never talk to him again, plus he threatened to beat him bloody. He seemed so serious, so in pain too, and it made Steve think that maybe something else was going on with Billy. Something more than what he lets everyone else see. And it's not just the queer thing, but he quickly put it out of his mind as they were in the middle of fucking. He misses that too. He misses a lot of things about Billy, somethings he didn't even realise he would. It's only been a week but for Steve it feels like a lifetime.

Billy was more than a 'warm mouth' to him as Billy would put it, he was a friend, a fucked up asshole friend, but a friend. He was the only one Steve had to talk to, the only one that would listen that could maybe understand. He knows has Dustin and the other kids are in his corner but that's just it. They're kids. They don't always get or understand where he's coming from. After Nancy, he needed someone and Billy was there, but now he's not and he has Nancy, not like that, but it fucking hurts. God, it really fucking hurts. Nancy and him are trying to be friends again, and it's easier than he would have ever imagined because they fit together just not in that way anymore, but Billy's not talking to him and Steve hates it. He hates the way his fingers are used as weapons instead of pleasure. He hates that Billy looks at him with contempt that with which was once awe. He hates that Billy is alone.

It's that last one that does it for Steve that strengthens his resolve. He decides then, sitting in class staring at the back of Billy's head that he's going to make him listen. That he's goes to hear him and understand that what he saw at the hospital was nothing like what he's been probably thinking for the past week. It wasn't him falling into Nancy's arms, it wasn't them getting back together. It was two

friends having a hard time and leaning on each other. Billy has to get that, right? Besides what right does he have to dictate who he can see? After all 'they're just a good fuck to each other'.

"Hey Dustin." Steve says as Dustin walks out of the middle school toward his car a few hours later.

"Yo, Steve, how's it going buddy? Good? Good, because we're having a science fair and me Lucas and Max are thinking of doing this project where you take sodium-" Dustin says excitedly as Steve start up his engine again.

"Look, that's great, but I need a favor." Steve says cutting Dustin off, too anxious to wait.

"What kind of favor?" Dustin asks suspiciously his eyes on Steve whose fingers tap on the steering wheel nervously as they drive.

"Nothing big, I just- I need to talk to Billy and I was wondering if you could get Max to-"

"Woah! Woah! Look Steve, you're my friend and I care about you, but Billy is an evil spawn of some kind of Satan and I'm going to do you a favor and say no."

"He's not-" Steve sighs. "Look can you just do this for me Dustin? Please."

Dustin looks over a little surprised and eyes Steve carefully. He's very suspicious but also a little concerned at how desperate Steve sounds. "Alright buddy, but I'm coming with you."

"No! No. Look just get Max to make Billy drive to the Tasha Lake Pier at eight tonight."

"...Okay." Dustin finally agrees. "But if you get killed or beaten up again I warned you!"

Steve sighs, but its lighter this time. He feels a little bit of weight lifted off of him. He can do this. He can... Is what he tells himself for the rest of the evening while he waits for the clock to hit eight. At quarter to he gets in his car and drives down. He's there at a little

past eight and sees Billy's car parked down on the ruff. Billy himself is standing against it smoking and looking extremely pissed off. Steve quickly makes his way down and turns off the engine. As soon as he's out of the car Billy's in his face.

"What the fuck is this Harrington!?" Billy yells. "Did you put Max up to this? Of course you fucking did. Can't you get it through your thick skull? I'm done with you. And your monster club. So fuck off. You got your Nancy back, now you can go cry about your stupid fucking problems to her. And leave me the fuck alone! Got it?"

Billy's hand is clutched onto Steve's shirt in a fist. Steve doesn't even blink an eye at it or the speech. He knows Billy. He knows he won't hurt him, not anymore, not ever. "If you would actually talk to me I wouldn't have had to get her to do this childish shit."

"Fuck you." Billy says as he lets go, backing up and lighting up another cigarette. "I have nothing to say to you."

"Well I do!" Steve says loudly. "I know that you're uncomfortable. Believe me I do. But you can't just walk away because you see something you don't like. Me and Nance, we're not like that anymore. She's my best friend- She was and now..."

"Now what? You guys are just fucking on the side? Must be some pussy, Harrington."

"Fuck you! I'm not- We're not, I don't like her like that. I don't love her. I-"

"Whatever. I have to go find where Max really is. Some of us actually have a family to look after." Billy says stomping on the cigarette as he makes his way to his car door, and yeah that hurt Steve a lot. A lot more than he thought it could.

"No! No." Steve says walking up to Billy, turning him around and pushing his back up against his car. His hands on either side. "Listen, Hargrove, there's only one person I'm fucking. And it's not Nancy."

He says it quietly, almost like a whisper very much aware of how the kids are probably somewhere around here trying to listen through

bushes a hundred meters away.

Billy smirks, that teasing tone back in his voice. “Is that so?”

“Yes.” And Steve is more serious than he’s ever been. “Come by my house later.”

“Fuck off.” Billy says but his face has lost its aggression and Steve knows in his own way he’s saying ‘see you there.’

Notes for the Chapter:

Aw they made up. :p We'll get more into the monster's and plot soon... If there is one, I don't know. I only work here or something.

9. "I Know It's Hard For You To Tell Me The Truth, But While We Are Doing So... I Love You."

Summary for the Chapter:

It's just a plate.

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments make me write faster. :P <3

It started with a plate which is stupid and silly. A plate. It started with a plate, falling through his fingers onto the hard floor shattering everywhere. It was white with a border of light blue zigzags that danced in the kitchen light. The pieces scattered across the crème tile and skidded to a stop all over. It was a pattern of disaster that unremarkably resembled exactly what Billy was feeling inside as it happened. He didn't mean to drop it, he didn't, it was just that Steve scared him and he jumped. This whole Upside down world and Demogorgon's, it's had him on edge. He didn't mean to do it. He didn't mean to drop the plate he just did.

They were all at Steve's house for the meeting about what happened with Mrs. Wheeler. About the Demogorgon dog thing. How if there's more, or if it was a just a fluke. What Jane felt when she did a sweep with Hopper, it turns out nothing, and according to her there are no rifts that she can feel. Which made them all come to the conclusion that it was only one lone creature left behind, probably in the woods or something and it attacking Will at Mike's was just a coincidence. Nobody seemed very comfortable with that conclusion, but it was the only one they had. It was decided then that they would keep an eye out. A couple searches here and there, Steve volunteered of course and so Billy had to too. Then they ordered pizza and they needed plates. He didn't mean to drop it. He didn't mean to do that.

"Billy." It's Lucas. It wasn't Steve that scared him, it was Lucas, so why did he think it was Steve? He swears he saw him, but maybe that was before- Maybe... "Billy?"

Billy looks up and there's concern there in the kid's eyes. It's weird,

unnatural, why would anyone have concern for him when he did this? He broke a plate. He- He did this. No one should feel concern for him, least of all the Sinclair kid, not after all that he's done to him. The racist shit, the pushing and yelling and clawing and scratching. The bruises and blood. He doesn't deserve this. He doesn't deserve- He's- He didn't mean to break the plate. It just fell, it just slipped. It wasn't his fault. It wasn't his fault, but it was. He broke the plate. No one else here but you Billy. No one else but you. No one else. Your fault. You broke it. Your fault.

"Hey, what's going on?" Steve says as he walks in, Lucas's hand is quick to stop him from walking onto the broken plate. Protecting him. Once he notices the pieces of a broken plate he looks up to see Billy staring at it, transfixed and almost lost. "Billy? Are you- It's just a plate."

"I'm sorry, Steve, I didn't mean to break it." Billy says and it's small, childlike as he looks up staring at Steve. His eyes hold something long lost as his features look as though he just murdered someone. It's eerie and so unlike Billy Steve's blood runs cold. He doesn't even care about the broken plate as he carefully walks around it to get closer to Billy. If he gets cut, then he gets cut.

"It's just a plate." Steve repeats as he reaches out and touches Billy's arm gently. Almost immediately Billy jumps back. His arm flinching like he's been burned as he comes out of his stupor. His face is a mask again and his lips are in a snarl. His eyes grow angry and his stance becomes defensive. "Billy...?"

"Get the fuck off of me." Billy says even though Steve isn't touching him. He then, very carefully to make sure he doesn't make any contact with him moves around. His boots step on the broken plate, crunching it underneath as he walks out of the kitchen. Steve is almost frozen as he watches him go. It's only Lucas's voice that snaps him out of it.

"Well?" Lucas says.

"What- What?" Steve asks, confused and steadily more worried.

"Aren't you going to go after him?" And yeah Lucas doesn't really

like the guy, but ever since Eleven told them what she did and after they saw the exchange with Steve... Maybe he's learning to tolerate him. Still doesn't excuse the racist shit though.

Steve races past Lucas and down the hallway as the noise from the living room grows louder. The kids are playing their game and the adults are watching a movie. They're waiting for their pizza. They're waiting for a plate. Steve doesn't waste anytime dwelling on it though as he calls out to Lucas behind him, "Don't step on the glass!" It's not really glass more of a ceramic but it's all the same when it breaks.

"Billy! Billy, wait!" Steve calls after him as he runs out of his front door.

Surprisingly Billy stops just as he reaches his car door. He doesn't turn to face Steve or even acknowledge he's there. He just stops and waits. His back is to Steve as he tries to breathe. He knows that Steve won't hurt him. He knows he would never do something like that. If anyone were to in this rela- If anyone was to hurt someone here it would be him. He's the fuck up. He's the angry one, the bully. He's the one that creates bruises and makes blood drip. He's the one that breaks things. Steve would never... He knows he would never, now only if he can somehow tell his body that too.

"It's a plate." Steve says quietly and almost dejected, unsure of what else he can say. "Don't go man, okay? Just stay and help me clean it up. It's just a plate."

"Fuck you." Billy whispers half heartily.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Steve half yells unable to stop himself. "You can't just- I haven't even done anything."

Billy closes his eyes briefly as the emotions, the pain and the raw anger engulf him. He opens his mouth and can't help but bite out, "Last time I broke a fucking plate- Look I'm fucking sorry okay, Steve? I'm not some bitch- I'm not some picture perfect prick. I'm fucking sorry for breaking it okay? Just fucking leave it at that."

"I know you're not. Look Billy I know- I know that it's hard for you to

tell me truth but while we're doing so I, look man I-"

"I love you! Oh my God! I love you, Steve. Thank you so much! This is exactly what I needed- We- we needed for the science fair." Dustin yells out as he runs into the front yard, Lucas behind him looking sheepish.

"You're welcome." Steve says, trying to act normal.

"Wait- Is- What's going on here?" Dustin asks squinting his eyes at both Steve, and Billy who still has his back turned.

Before Steve can say anything Billy does. "Nothing you little shit. Just ran out of cigarettes. Came to get my spare pack."

It's a lie, but Steve doesn't care and he doesn't correct it. He simply nods and adds on more to the falsehood as they make their way back inside. And then Billy finds himself in the kitchen, the broken plate cleaned and put away in the garbage probably- Well he feels relieved. Because he doesn't have to look at it anymore and... That's where it should be, shouldn't it?

10. "You Love To Argue, You Can't Play Guitar, But Still, Let Me Tell You That I Love Who You Are."

Steve kisses Billy messily as he tugs on the long tendrils of hair that frame his perfect features. His hand curls into a fist as he tugs his head back, their lips untangling as their eyes lock. They're both sweaty and out of breath. The first round was good, but the second even better and more tiresome. It leaves Billy smiling down at the other teenager while his hair is tugged. He told Steve he liked it rough, it was obvious but Steve always needs conformation for what he does to Billy. To know for sure that it's okay, Billy's not really sure why, nor does he care very much as long as they both get what they need from the experience.

"Take a picture, Harrington, it'll last longer." Billy says with a smirk as he lays on top of Steve, their skin on fire between them.

"It's just..." Steve starts saying, his eyes turning from lustful to awe filled. "You're beautiful."

Billy's teasing smirk is gone and his eyes turn to sadness and anger as he slips out of Steve's grip. His head shakes away the fingers curling around his hair and his body falls off of Steve's as he rolls onto his back then to his side. He reaches out to his nightstand and gets a cigarette. He lights it quickly and takes a deep puff. He balances it in his mouth as he reaches for his underwear on the floor and pulls them on. He takes a sip from his flask as Steve stares at Billy's back sheen with sweat.

"I- Look, man, I'm sorry." Steve says.

"Shut up." Billy says but there's no bite to it, there's nothing at all in fact.

"Fine." Steve says turning from him and to his own clothes scattered across the floor. He looks for his underwear, then his jeans. They're on in a matter of seconds as he searches for his shirt but it's dark and Billy really did throw it across the room somewhere. He tries and tries to look for it, all the while Billy smokes staring up at his ceiling, and it doesn't take long for that afterglow to where off and for Steve

to get frustrated. No, scratch that he's pissed. It's been what? Almost six months? It's almost May for God's sake and yet they're still doing this dance where they pretend all they are to each other is a good fuck, when they both no better. At least Steve does, he knows what he feels, and he knows that when he fucks into Billy he looks at him with trust. It's fucking trust and he knows- he feels that Billy feels something for him. Something more than resentment and anger, and lust. It's something else, something more. "You know what, Hargrove? No. No fucking way we are doing this again."

Billy looks up sharply at this, there's a brief flash of pain before that wall, and that barrier is up again. He huffs and says with forced indifference, "Suit yourself, Harrington. Plenty of warm mouths out there."

"Stop, just fucking stop, Billy."

Billy freezes. He never uses his name, not like, not ever. "Stop what?"

"This! This bullshit. I know you like me or at the very least I know you don't hate me."

"You know nothing about me." Billy says and yeah it's the most cliché stupidest thing he's ever said, but Steve has a way of doing that, of bringing the stupid out in him.

"Yes. I do." Steve says seriously. "I know you hate eggs, they make you sick. I know that you secretly love the Ghostbusters because you make me watch it every time we have a movie night. I know that even though you pretend to hate Max that you really care about her. And I know that when we're together you don't want it to stop. You always hold on to me just a little tighter every time we're together again."

"Shut up." Billy says and this time there is anger, but it's a sad sort of anger.

"And you love to argue." Steve says as he walks over to Billy, on the other side of the bed, his hand reaching out to his cheek, a mirror image of when he tried to touch him at the start of all of this. Only

this time, Billy isn't running. "You can't play guitar, but still, let me tell you that I love who you are."

Steve's thumb rubs across his cheek. Billy's heart stops momentarily as he says, "What the fuck are you saying?"

"God that was the worst, most cliché thing ever." Steve says, ducking his head as his cheeks heat up with embarrassment. "I feel like some girl."

Billy has some retort on the tip of his tongue, ready to come out but before he can the door slams open and his worst nightmare becomes real. Neil Hargrove stands in front of them both. His eyes have that same nothingness as always, but his body vibrates with anger. His fingers clench into fists as Billy's body freezes in fear. Steve's already moved his hand, standing beside Billy now. He's filled with fear too, but it's not the same, it's nothing like the paralyzing ocean of pain that fills Billy. The only thought going through his head is Neil wasn't supposed to be back until Monday.

"Mr. H- Har- Hargrove." Steve says nervously after a few long moments of tense silence.

"Boy." Is all Neil says before his body moves slowly toward where Steve is. It's what snaps Billy out of his fear, because he's not alone. He's not- Steve's here and he's a 'man', his father will want to teach him a lesson too.

Not caring that he's only wearing any underwear he gets up, grabbing Steve's arm, and walks past Neil. He uses his body to shield Steve from Neil as he picks up said teenager's car keys and moves him to the door. Surprisingly Neil lets them by, but Billy knows better than to leave this room.

"Leave. Get out of here." Billy says quietly and urgently as he pushes the keys into Steve's hand. His voice has just enough venom to make Steve look from him to Neil and nod his head. He makes his way out the door, forgetting about his lost shirt, but before he leaves completely he stops and looks back.

"Are you going to be-"

“Go home Steve.”

Trusting that Billy can handle his own, that it can't be that bad, Steve does just that.

11. "Love, I Hope You Are Well."

Notes for the Chapter:

Please take note of the tags. I've updated them and as the story progresses will continue to do so.

It's all Billy's fault. He did this, the blood that drips and sheds, it's all his fault. He should have known that Neil would show up. That he does randomly, that he comes and goes whenever he wants. He should have known better and tried to protect Steve. Billy suspects that the only reason Neil let Steve go was because he knows what good friends he is with the Chief of police, Hopper. That's the only reason, because last time- ...He wouldn't have let him go otherwise. Even though it's dangerous to think let alone say, Neil is a coward. He can beat Billy until he's black and blue but facing anyone who opposes him, he'll shiver down into a small mass and run. That's what happened in California, but at the end of the day, it was his fault, it always is.

"What did we talk about?" Neil Hargrove asks as he stands over Billy who lays on the ground clutching his stomach.

"Respect and responsibility." Billy spits out as small droplets of blood spill, it tastes like he swallowed a penny, but it's not as unusual as it was at the start of this all those years ago.

Neil sneers as he kicks Billy once more in the stomach, but since his hands are trying to protect his abdomen it lands on his left arm instead. He wants to cry out in pain but he knows better, so he remains silent as he bites at his lip making it bleed too. He curls even more into himself in a fetal position, waiting, waiting for it to be over. He just has to get through this and then it will be over. Only a little bit longer. Neil's already dealt the more deadly blows which is why he can't get up, now he wants to hear him say it. Only a few more minutes. Only a few more.

"I. Can't. Hear. You." Neil says through gritted teeth as he aims another kick then one more for good measure.

"Respect and responsibility! Sir!" Billy says loudly, his stomach throbbing as his arm feels numb all over.

"Is that attitude, *son*." Neil spits out and no, no that's not right. Neil's never said that, he's never... "Get up."

Billy freezes, his eyes widening.

"I said GET UP!" Neil's hand is in Billy's hair as he pulls him up. He's not strong enough to do it on his own, but Billy stumbles against the dresser as he rises to his feet. Neil's face is close enough to count all of his eyelashes when Neil says quietly, "Respect and responsibility, is right. We've talked about this."

There's a moment, one small amount of time where everything stops and a choice is made as Billy smiles, his mouth bloody and raw. "What Neil? Afraid a colored gang is going to run you out of town again?"

Neil snaps, his leg comes up and knees Billy sharply in his stomach. Billy goes down and before he can react or move or do anything else Neil steps on his leg. Billy almost breaks and yells out, but his teeth are in his lips, biting down and he manages not to. The pain comes in waves, but he can handle this. He can. Only a few more moments, minutes even and Neil will get bored. His anger will be gone, made only noticeable in the blacks and purples of Billy's skin. Just a little bit longer. A little longer.

"You know, I don't think that you do understand." Neil says stopping his assault as he walks around Billy's curled up broken body. "Perhaps Maxine will. She's always been the more intelligent one in this household."

Billy stops moving. He's frozen as the sick sickening realization of what he's implying fully engulfs him. Instead of taking it out on him, he's going to do it to Max. Firecracker Max who fights back, but is too young and small to win. Not unless she has some drugs on hand or the element of surprise. Two things she'll never get past Neil Hargrove. Her bones probably will break more easily, they always did when he was younger. Then who's next? Susan? No, no, fuck no. He can handle this. He can listen. He's the one who deserves this. It's

his fault that Neil does this. {But even thinking it feels wrong.}

“You make me do this, Billy, if you would only listen. Understand your responsibilities, your respect to me and Susan. You try to do the best for your kids and they end up being... Ungrateful.” Another kick to his stomach. “Disrespectful.” Another hit, but at least his foot is off Billy’s leg pressing down. “Loose.”

“I’m sorry, Sir.” Billy says loudly, not enough to be yelling and that makes Neil smile, but it’s grim and angry.

“I should hope so. That boy, maybe he needs a lesson too. I hear from Maxine that his parents are never there.”

“No, no, it was me. I’m sorry, Sir.”

Neil grins.

His last kick is sharp and Billy gasps. He can’t breathe as Neil stomps out of the room, shutting his door swiftly. Billy’s fingers curl into the carpet as intense anger rips through him, and as he struggles for breath. It takes longer than he would have liked before that sweet oxygen fills him again and he can breathe. He lays there for many minutes just doing that his arms start to tingle in pain, his leg feels like little prickles are all over, and his stomach is one big fiery pit of agony. His face is unhurt, only a little blood from biting into his cheek. He should be ready for school tomorrow. He laughs bitterly at that, even if there is no one in the room but him. School. School... Steve.

Steve.

The thought of him, of what he has to do is too much. It sends a sharp pain through his chest that cuts deeper than his father’s blows. Despite his situation he can’t help but think, ‘Love, I hope you are well.’ Because he does, he hopes that with his father showing up, that he’s not freaking out. That he’s okay. And he wants him. He wants Steve. It’s silly and illogical but he wants to call him. To have Steve’s warm hands all over him, mixing the pain with pleasure until he doesn’t know the difference. He wants Steve to say some sappy shit like it’s all going to be okay, but Billy knows better. He knows that it

will never be okay. Not ever.

His hand uncurls from the carpet fibers and he reaches out for his bed frame to help him get up. He could sleep on the floor all night but he would be even sorer in the morning if that's even possible. He's learned from experience that moving around helps with the pain later, but he doesn't get very far as his hand lands on what seems to be a soft fabric. He doesn't leave clothes lying around, he knows better, so when he holds it up in front of his eyes and sees that it's a blue tee shirt he wants to cry. Which is ridiculous and stupid. He's been through this so many times, but the shirt, it- it smells like Steve. It is Steve.

Billy can almost feel his hand on his cheek, warm and calming. His brown doe eyes boring into his and saying, 'I love who you are. I love you, dumbass.' Billy almost smiles at the picture he paints behind his eyelids as the shirt is held up to his face. It's then that he feels the welling up of tears, and before he can stop himself or tell himself that he can't do this, he's crying. It's not actual crying, he forgot how to do that a long time ago, instead it's only a few tears slipping out before they stop all together and he's left only with the beige carpet under his back, the throbbing of pain, and the lingering smell of Steve.

12. "At Least We Now Both Have A Story To Tell."

Notes for the Chapter:

Two chapters in one day!! I must be insane. :P

Steve was running like his life depended on it, around and around the track he went. His lungs burned as though they were on fire as sweat poured down his head and back. His ankles and legs screamed in pain for him to stop but he doesn't, he only keeps on running. The red dirt of the track spits up at the intensity of how his shoes dig into it. He leaves tiny peoples flying up behind him as he arms come up, moving alongside him at a similar speed. He barely has time to pant let alone breathe as he wizzes by the bleachers for the fifteenth time. He's close to collapse now, and yet, he keeps on going. He doesn't stop, he doesn't even falter. He runs and runs along.

'I don't love you,' is the only thing replaying in his mind as he goes along the donut shape. It plays in his mind over and over new found with intensity and pain, but it doesn't hurt when he's running, not really. Only his lungs burn, not his heart, and so he runs. 'I don't love you,' it feels wrong like a lie or some primitive mistrust. It seems fractured and dirty. It feels so wrong, because how can Billy not love him? He doesn't think this as him being arrogant like everyone has to love him or something, but he knew- he knows that Billy feels something for him. He knows it.

He knows it like he knows that sky is blue or that the grass is green. It goes far beyond words, Billy's love laid in gestures of sincerity. Of holding on just a little bit longer, the way he pushed Steve out of the way when that car came barreling at them. In the way Billy would stroke up his face and then down his body. In the way their kisses became desperate, hungry for something more than gratification. As they both became hungry for each other's souls. Steve knows that Billy feels something for him, something deep and maybe it's not love but it's not nothing either. He knows it. So why then when he said it did Steve accept it? Why is he running? Why is he letting him go?

"Billy, thank God." Steve says in exasperation as he walks up to Billy, almost three weeks after the incident at the Hargrove residence.

Billy looks nervous as he eyes the kids around them even though it's early and there's hardly anyone there. When his eyes land back on Steve they're hard as he says, "Shut up." Steve would say more but Billy's already grabbing him by the arm and dragging him into an empty bathroom. Steve stares at Billy as he checks in all the stalls making sure that no one is here, when he's satisfied he looks back to Steve who feels concern overwhelm him as the realization of the limp and the way Billy holds his arm overcome him.

"Billy, I..." Steve says slowly and sadly as he's overcome with sadness and anger. It washes over him suddenly and it makes him want to touch Billy, to make sure he's really okay. That he's in one piece, that he's okay.

"Fuck you, it's not what you think, Harrington." He says as he lights up a cigarette. "I was arguing with my dad when I tripped down the stairs."

The wrongness of that statement fills Steve to the brim. "B- B- But-"

"But what? I'm clumsy. Fuck off, like you're not constantly getting nosebleeds."

Relief fills Steve, because he fell down the stairs. It makes sense, right? Billy was really injured, if his dad took a hit it would show. His face bears no mark, he's fine, and he just fell down some stairs. Which is good, but what about his dad? They literally caught them together with their pants down and it's 1985 in a small town in Illinois. There's no way he got off fine. Steve's not an idiot.

"What did your dad say about us?" Steve asks, taking a small step forward fully expecting Billy to take one back, but he doesn't. It's surprising and maybe it's good news then.

"Nothing." Billy says, but it's far too angry to be the truth.

"Just fucking tell me, I can handle it." Steve tells him earnestly as he reaches out his hand to rest on Billy's arm. He doesn't shake it off, he only looks at Steve regretfully.

"He set me right." Billy tells him, his jaw clenching before finally

moving backward, Steve's hand falling uselessly to his own side. "I shouldn't be fooling around with fags like you."

And ow, okay, that hurt even if he was expecting it. "Bil-"

"Oh for fucks sake Harrington, you were always just a warm mouth to me." Billy says turning away from Steve.

"Billy I- I know that you feel something for me this isn't-"

"Do you want me to say it? What is this some kind of soap? I don't love you, Harrington. Never did and never will. It's time I found some real pussy to keep me busy." His smile is cruel and bitter.

"Right, because the great Billy Hargrove could never admit to anyone not even himself that he's a great big faggot!" Steve says, his eyes filling with unshed tears as he throws his arms into the air. He can't believe he just said that, but Billy always did know how to bring out the worst in him. "At least we now both have a story to tell."

Billy reacts suddenly. The cigarette is on the ground and his fist is in Steve's shirt with his fist held up ready to cast a hit. His eyes are filled with anger, but when he meets Steve's sad ones he stops. Steve isn't moving, doesn't even attempt to fight back. It makes Billy pause then let go of his shirt. He backs up and smirks coldly. "You're not worth it."

He walks around Steve, lighting up another cigarette, not caring that he's going into the school hallway as he does so. Steve stands there, staring at the white bathroom tile and listens as the door slams behind the teenager. It's at that moment that he breaks. The tears start to fall and big ugly sobs tumble out of his lips as he tries to muffle the sound with his jacket sleeve. He doesn't know how long he sits there on the dirty school bathroom before Jonathan enters, and when he does, he pulls Steve into a tight hug, Steve thanks every deity out there that it was him who found him. Even if they aren't one hundred percent yet, it's better than Tommy or another of those pricks finding him. Better.

13. "I Feel You Know Me Better Than Most."

Notes for the Chapter:

Some things have happened in my life that has prevented me from updating for a while, but I'm back. Enjoy! :3

"So the Ion combines with this other thing and it becomes this thing." Steve explains as he relays the information Nancy just gave him back to her in his own words and with the help of the pictures from the textbook.

"Actually it's this thing." Jonathan chimes in, pointing his pen to an entirely different diagram.

"Fuck me." Steve says as he sighs.

"Steve!" Nancy says at his choice of language, her features scandalized. Steve never used to say things like when they were together, but maybe he was behaving around her and now that they're friends it's all different. He can say whatever he wants around her. Or talk as though friends would. Or maybe it was Billy. Steve never really gave them any details, only that they had been seeing each other since the dance, or after the dance. Nancy never really asked for details. They're friendship was still fragile and Steve was fragile, but maybe now... It's been a few weeks since they started becoming friends again.

"Well, what about this element then?" Steve asks Jonathan as he skooshes over across the carpet on Nancy's bedroom floor. They were all studying together, getting ready for the final exams, even though it wasn't until the end of May and it's only the beginning of April everyone was on edge. Senior year and all that, besides Nancy insisted. Steve was pretty sure it was another ploy to get them all together again and have it be less awkward than the nights at the diner, and he's pretty sure Jonathan sees that too.

"So, prom is coming up." Nancy says in what she probably thinks is casually, but Steve and Jonathan know her better than that.

“...Right.” Steve says, but it’s more of a question for what she’s getting at.

“Jonathan and I are going, but are you and...”

Steve sighs inwardly. He was hoping she wouldn’t, but who can blame her really? Billy Hargrove isn’t just another nerd in Math class. This isn’t some low grade relationship, and they’re supposed to be friends. Steve’s supposed to talk to them and vice versa, but how can he? How can he say anything in Hawkins other than, ‘I’m normal’? Jonathan is still a little dicey about it and so is Nancy, anyone would be. Two guys? Queer? In this town? That’s a death sentence.

“Nance, even if, we’re not...” How can he explain this to where it makes sense? It hurts. It really fucking hurts to think about what happened with Billy. Jonathan was there, he knows, he understands, he doesn’t ask him these questions. Maybe he shouldn’t have told him to keep it from Nancy. If she knew she would give him sad eyes and even sadder hugs, but then she wouldn’t be asking these questions. She’d already know the answers. She’d leave him alone. Who is he fucking kidding? This is Nancy Wheeler, she wouldn’t ever just ‘leave things alone.’

“It’s prom, Nance, a little too formal for a couple of fags.” He says it so causally, that the slap across his face from Nancy shocks both teenage boys in the room.

“What the hell Nancy!?” Steve says outraged as he holds his cheek.

“Don’t ever call yourself or anyone else that, Steve Harrington.”

“God- Sorry.”

Nancy looks upset, the anger gone as she says, “Jonathan can you go get him some ice.”

Jonathan looks from Steve to Nancy, still shocked. “Sure, alright.”

Once he’s gone, Nancy looks Steve square in the eyes and says, “I love you. And it’s okay to be who you are. To like guys, even if the rest of the world might not think it’s okay. But you have to be okay with it too, Steve, because if you don’t then no one will. ...I’m sorry

for slapping you.”

“Nance... We broke up, or whatever... Besides, I saw him making out with Alice from Trig.” It hurts to say, and it hurts even more to finally admit it to himself, but it also feels freeing. Billy hurt him in more ways than one. The day after he’s suddenly lip locked with Alice Travis. They’re going steady and strong, even if Nancy and Jonathan have been too busy wrapped up in themselves to notice.

“I’m sorry Steve.” Nancy says, all sympathetic eyes and voice. “But you need to accept it and move on. You deserve better. If you keep holding onto hope for him you’ll never be happy.”

Steve looks to the carpet than up to Nancy, smiling slightly, he says, “I feel you know me better than most, Nance.”

“Of course I do, dumbass, I’m your best friend.”

Steve laughs. “Yeah, well, you’ll have to fight with Dustin for that title.”

“I can take him, thank you very much.”

They both laugh at the image of them fighting against each other as Jonathan walks in handing Steve the ice. “What’s so funny?”

After the laughter dies down, and Jonathan is filled in about everything they decide to order a pizza. Of course, it turns into an all-out rock, paper, and scissors match as someone like anchovies and another wants mushrooms. They end up with half and half, opening a can of grape each in front of the TV. They’re watching some old black and white movie on channel 6 when they get the phone call. Nancy’s parents are out on a date, the youngest already in bed sleeping, and Mike over at Will’s so the phone gets picked up by Nancy. She’s laughing with Jonathan and Steve about some accent by some character on the movie they have no idea what the title is when she says, “Hello?”

Both Jonathan and Steve stop laughing as Nancy’s face becomes serious. She listens to the other end for a while before she turns her eyes to Steve, “It’s for you. It’s your dad.”

Steve gets up and walks over, a bad feeling in his stomach as he puts the phone to his ear. "Dad?"

"Son? Steve? I'm at the house, where are you?" He says.

And no, that's not right. His father always calls before he comes home, always. "Dad, what's going on?"

"Steve I- Come home. We can talk there."

"No, dad, what is it?" That bad feeling grows.

His dad sighs. "I'm sorry, Stevie," And that's not right, an old nickname from when he was five. His mom always used to call him that, his dad maybe once, he wouldn't... "Your mother is dead. It wasn't..."

Steve doesn't hear the rest of it. Not really, he feels out of his body, and out of this world. He feels gone. He feels numb.

14. "In Spite Of Real Distance, We'll Always Be Close."

Notes for the Chapter:

A lot of you are wondering why this is so sad and when is it going to get better- And I honestly can't tell you that. BUT, it will eventually get to a sweet spot. But like life, it takes time.

"What the hell are you doing here?" It's dark out and raining when Steve opens the door, and sees who it is. It's nearly midnight in fact, and he's tired. He just got back from France and he's exhausted. He hasn't been sleeping well since the Demo-dog thing and now this. Every time he shuts his eyes he sees his mom, her mouth unable to shut, her vacant eyes staring into nothing. Despite it, she was still so beautiful. It was supposed to be a closed coffin but Steve rushed into the morgue, wanting to see her one last time. To have one last image of his mother. And he got just that.

She was covered with a sheet but it was still horrible to witness. To see his mother deprived of her privacy, her body empty. There was nothing there, not even the lingering smell of her perfume. Steve remembers it so clearly, the last time he saw her almost four years ago. He remembers the way she hugged him, how full and ever encompassing she was. But now- or then at the morgue, there, in that cold place she was so small and frail. Apparently she had cancer for a long time, never bothering to tell Steve or his father. They only found out when they got there, after she passed away. When there was nothing that they could do. Being told by a friend they never even knew.

"Steve?" It's Billy's voice that draws him away from those memories and into the present. He stands there, concern in his eyes that seems so foreign. Why would he be concerned? He ended things, they haven't- they're not- Steve was just a warm mouth. That's how it was. He said it himself, so why is he here?

"Why are you here?" He asks it, but his voice is hollow and empty. He doesn't even recognize it himself, but he's too numb to care. He's so lost and out of himself. None of it makes sense, nothing makes

sense anymore. He always tried to make things make sense, especially with Billy, but now it doesn't matter. It never did. Nothing ever makes sense, none of it does.

"I heard what happened." Billy says. "I'm sorry."

Nothing makes sense, but this makes even less of it. Billy saying, 'sorry' is unheard of and uncalled for. It doesn't sound right coming from his lips, to Steve's ears and to Billy's own. The words sound uncomfortable coming out, but come out they do. Steve doesn't know what to say to it, how to respond. All he knows is what Billy has told him, what people say. The rest doesn't make sense. Or none of it does.

"I was a warm mouth- a good fuck, remember?" Steve says, his brown eyes finally looking up from their place on Billy's boots.

Billy looks pained and angry all in one as he clenches his jaw. He looks from left to right, moving his feet nervously. "I know what I said, Harrington. But- I lost my mom too, okay? And I- fuck I just- I know what I said. But I can't- I can't be- In spite of the distance, of real distance between us, we'll always be close. I- We're friends, aren't we?"

Billy looks so vulnerable and confused, that it throws Steve, even in this disjointed place his mind and body are in. He has an urge to reach out, to comfort and confirm what Billy is saying. But that instinct, that compelling urge it comes from is a place that cares. That feels; and Steve doesn't feel right now. He's all numb and hollow and nothing makes sense. So Instead, he only stands and stares at Billy.

"Fuck! Just- Fuck you!" Billy says and then he's gone, walking down the drive way into rain. His car isn't there, which surprises Steve and makes him wonder if he walked all the way there, which doesn't make sense. He doesn't get to ponder on it for long because Billy stops suddenly and turns back around. Steve still stands there as he gets close, in his face. "No! Look, I didn't- I know what it's like. Go hang out with Nancy or even fucking Jonathan- Just don't be alone right now, okay? Just don't."

Steve closes his eyes, letting his body relax into a sigh as he grips the

door knob tightly. His father left, it's true, but he doesn't need him here. He doesn't care and he doesn't need anyone here. Sure, being alone makes it worse, he feels how out of place he is so much more. And yeah, maybe that knife on the kitchen table looks a little too tempting as he is reminded of how much he doesn't fit, but he doesn't need anyone here. He doesn't. Besides, Nancy and Jonathan are on some kind of camping thing and the kids are kids. They don't need this crap. And he doesn't need anyone telling him what *he* needs, least of all Billy fucking Hargrove.

"Go home, Billy." Steve says through clenched teeth as he opens his eyes and meets Billy's. "Just fucking go home."

Something passes through Billy's eyes before those walls are back up. His shoulders hunch up and his mouth is set into a grim line. He takes a step back and gives enough room for Steve to shut the outside door and step inside. They stare at each other for another good long moment before Steve slams the inside door. He locks it and in the most cliché thing ever slides down and sits with his back to Billy who stands there a moment longer than needed on the other side. It's a moment too long for Billy as he looks at the door one last time and then walks away. Back into the rain, and back to the hell he calls home. His only relief on the other side of that door, so lost and confused, and empty.

So alone.

15. "I Walked Through The Rain For You, You Said To Go Home."

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter was cliché and cheesy as all living hell, but I loved writing it and I hope you all love reading it. Things will get a little more real in the next few chapters and ooh, maybe a little plot? :)

The pattering of the rain grows louder and louder. At first it was a drizzle, a gloomy day with some rain, but now it's a dark night and the rain pounds. It comes down like thunder above Steve's head as he sits on the mat, his back against the door. His head leans back, exposing his throat, his eyes are closed and directed to the ceiling where the water pours outside. The noise vibrating through his every nerve ending as an old song repeats in his head. Something about love and life lost. It was playing at his mom's funeral. Her and her friend's favorite song apparently. It was catchy and Steve can remember every beat. It was nothing special at the time, but now, listening to the rain it feels more beautiful than ever as he can remember his mom dancing once a long time ago.

Her smile was radiant as it lit up the room, the music made her sway back and forth. She wore an old dress made of blue and gold silk. Her hair was in curls and her hands keyed an instrument only seen in her mind. The music came from the record player she and Steve's father got at their wedding from his mom's parents. It was an expensive gift at the time. A grand gesture that told them Steve's mom's parents approved and were ecstatic about this union. Both of his parents enjoyed it, but not as much as his mom. He's watched her dance to the music before, all his life, but now at the age of thirteen, coming home from eighth grade, she seems different. More open and free. It makes Steve, who stands by the door smile. It doesn't take long for his mom to notice him, it's almost like she can feel him, must be a mother's instinct.

"Hello, love." Her voice has the smallest hint of an English tone, coming from his grandmother's side. His grandmother used to live in England, coming over during World War II with her husband who was a lieutenant

on the Western Front.

"Hey mom." Steve says smiling. "I like that song."

She laughs. "I got it from Meryl down the road. She kicked her husband out and all of his belongings, he didn't want his records. She said I could have them."

It sounded like a wacky thing to come from someone in such a small town in 1979 America, but most in the town were used to the Harrison's escapades. It was now simply common knowledge and acceptance that Meryl would kick her husband out from time to time, but he would always come back and she would let him. A bouquet of flowers and an apology. He promised he would never stay out late again, and that he wasn't seeing any harlots on the side. And old term, but they were old, their kids already moved out and on to better and brighter things.

Steve laughs as he pictures the scene, remembering once in sixth grade when he ran into Mr. Harrison walking down the road. All flustered and his jacket dirty from being thrown out to him. He grumbled all the way down the road. He and Tommy made funny impressions about it for weeks afterwards.

"Would you like to dance with me?" She says happily.

Steve smiles and is about reach out his hand to clasp onto her outstretched one when the front door slams. Steve instinctively flinches away and runs into the hallway. He hides behind the wall as he hears his father's voice, loud and crass. "That's it! Deloris, you've taken this too far!"

"Henry..." She says calmly.

"Don't Henry me!"

"Keep your voice down! Steve-"

"Oh, that's rich! If you really cared about him, you wouldn't be doing this." His father's voice is livid.

"Henry, we aren't working. Lots of people get divorces now. It's not an ugly word or a death sentence." She reasons.

"What about Steve? Did you ever hope to think about him in all of this? And what about us? I thought that we were going to try ag-"

"No! I'm not going to subject myself to that again."

"She's gone, Dor, Mar-"

"Don't." Steve's mom says with pain laced into her words.

"Fine." Henry says. "But I'm not signing those papers. And you're not taking Steve away! I can have you committed."

His voice is dark, a tone that Steve really never has heard come from him before. His mom seems to though as she says, "I'm not crazy, Henry. I fell in love."

"THAT FRUITCAKE IS NOT YOUR HUSBAND. I AM! If you want to leave, I won't stop you."

The tears fall freely now as Steve sobs. His body racks with the pain as he covers his ears with his hands, just like when he did all those years ago. He tries to block out the words, the pain, and the truth that is so real, but it doesn't help. The rain pours on and his heart aches. The mat on his feet is prickly and uncomfortable. The door he rests his back on his hard. This world is cruel and he doesn't want to feel like this. He needs some relief.

In one swift moment he turns around and opens the door. Lightning strikes in the sky and as he peers into the darkness, even with his outside lights on he can't see Billy. He can't see his strong retreating form. He can't seem him at all. How long was he sitting there for? He doesn't have long to linger on it as he runs into the kitchen and grabs his keys out of the wooden bowl. His speed is so great that the bowl rolls and slips off of the cupboard, onto the floor. He pays no mind to it as he runs past it and the knife he somehow managed to knock down with it but never notices. He makes his way out the front door and to his car where he starts the engine in a hurry.

"Come on. Come on." Steve whispers to himself as he drives down the gravel road, looking for that boy's figure that he knows so well. He ends up driving a couple of miles before he finally finds him,

jeans and leather jacket. His long hair is drenched and Steve's pretty sure he's shivering. He really didn't have his car, he doesn't have anything.

"What the h- hell ar- are you doing h- here?" Billy says between shivers. The rain now pours on them both as Steve has gotten out of the car, staring at Billy. He's almost frozen, not sure what to say or do. "Wha- What do y- you w-w- want H-a-arrington?"

"Get in!" Steve says through the rumbling of thunder.

"You told me to go home, remember!?" Billy yells with a smile that is unforgiving and almost humours in a self-deprecating way. "I walked through the rain for you! Like some fucking girl! But no! No, the great King Steve didn't need me! Didn't fucking want me! You said to go home. I can take a fucking hint!"

And Steve wants to retaliate, tell or ask or yell or whatever about Alice. About her tongue down his throat. He wants to tell Billy that he's the one that said they're done. He wants to tell him to fuck or screw or whatever- himself, but he also wants to tell him to shut up to just get in the goddamn car. And at the same time he wants to tell him about his mom, about how lost and confused he is. How he doesn't feel like he fits in this fucking life- in this world. He wants to listen too, he wants to know what's going on with Billy. He wants to hear about *his* mom. He wants to be there for him too, but it's raining and thundering and they're in some kind of goddamn sappy romance novel. The rain and forbidden romance included, so he doesn't say anything. Instead he runs up and hugs him. Because they're here, together and nothing makes sense but this.

They're here and they're alive. And Billy hugs him back. Some part of him needs Steve like Steve needs him. And that's all Steve ever needs to understand. That's all he ever needs to makes sense of.

16. "Miss You Terribly Already."

Notes for the Chapter:

Last chapter we learned a little more about Steve and his parents. His dad? Not so great, but his mom did choose to leave. Which we might be able to understand, but can Steve?

"So what you're saying is that this little girl is a witch?" Billy asks the kids skeptically as he points to Jane.

"Oh my god! She's our Mage!" Dustin yells in outrage. "What don't you get about that? Is it the hair? Does it make you evil and stupid?"

"You little shit." Billy says as he takes a step closer. All of the other kids crowd in then as they take a step back, almost protecting each other. The only ones who don't are Max and Jane who aren't afraid. They stand aside from the boys, Jane with a fascinated look and Max with a bored one. It's then that Steve feels like he should step in.

"Alright! Alright! That's enough." Steve says as he walks in-between them. Surprisingly to everyone Billy takes a step back, listening to Steve.

"I need a smoke." Billy says. "Why am I even here?"

"Yeah, why is he here?" Dustin asks before Steve can give an answer.

"He's here because he knows." Steve explains to them all. "He's a part of this now. Besides, we can use all the help we can get."

Dustin pulls Steve by the shirt, making him move to the other side of the living room. It's a big one, Steve's house is huge making it enough space so that the others don't hear them.

"Steve, he's evil!" It's a hushed yet loud whisper. "Look at that hair. Evil."

Steve sighs. He knows that not everyone will be thrilled to have Billy here, in on the secret meetings and helping out. Him being part of the

'team,' but they need him. Whatever this thing is that Hopper and Eleven keep talking about, it's not good. It's big and maybe even worse than last time. Billy's a strong fighter, and he helped Nancy's mom and Will. He deserves to be a part of this. Besides he has to drive Max and Steve doesn't see him at all anymore except at school which is always a fleeting touch or glance. He's going crazy here, and maybe it's selfish but he needs him here.

"He stays." Steve says, his voice firmly resolved.

"But-

"No. He stays. That's it. No discussion."

Dustin huffs in anger but walks back to the group without further complaint. Despite that, Steve knows he'll bring it up again later. When they're alone and Dustin can yell at him until the cows come home. At the moment though, they need to focus. Hopper and Joyce will be here soon with Nancy and Jonathan, then they can begin the meeting. That little nothing, left over Demogorgon dog thing wasn't all there was. Apparently there's been more, sightings or something. Hopper was pretty vague about it on the phone when he asked Steve to gather the kids at his place. Now, they're stuck waiting, and so what if he told Billy to stay?

"You can't smoke in here, Jackass." Dustin says to Billy who tries to light up a cigarette. "Steve doesn't like it."

It makes Billy pause and then put away the lighter. Steve watches the interaction and makes a mental note to tell him that it's okay later. That he doesn't mind it much, only that he told Dustin once he had a minor form of asthma, which has made the kid more consciousness about smoke. Steve really doesn't care if he smokes, he knows Billy loves it and after sex he loves it even more. Not that they're having that right now, or any kind of interaction outside of school and when they're dropping off the kids.

That night in the rain, Steve thought it meant something, and it did but it doesn't change things. That's what Billy said, he also said they can't until his dad becomes more lax with him. That it might not be until the summer when they get to hang out again. Which isn't for

another two months, and two months can be a long time. It can feel like forever.

“You got any beer, Harrington?” Billy asks.

“Yeah, let me show you.” Steve says, walking towards the kitchen like Billy doesn’t know exactly where everything is. Like he hasn’t been here almost every weekend for the past few months.

“Ah, damn, you got the good stuff.” Billy says as he grabs one from the fridge and pops it open with his teeth like some kind of television character. “That’s why I like you.”

Those last words are said in a humours way, but Steve knows better. He sees beyond the snark and sees the sincerity behind them. He sees Billy, right here only inches apart, closer than they’ve been in a long time. The urge to touch, to hold, to kiss is overwhelming. Steve looks behind him and listens for the kids. He hears them arguing about some D&D thing. They’ll be at that for hours if he lets them, they won’t be coming here to the kitchen.

Steve reaches out and touches Billy’s arm, it makes the teenager pull back suddenly. Anger lines appear as his mouth turns into a frown, “What are you doing?”

“I miss you. I miss you terribly already.” Steve says honestly as he feels the familiar tentacles of hurt at the way Billy rejects his touch.

“I told you, we can’t.” Billy says whispering. His eyes are sad, which is strange for Billy, but there is also the familiar anger, not at Steve, but at the situation. “Not until my dad backs off.”

Steve doesn’t say anything to that, only looks down his eyes sadder than they’ve ever been. It makes Billy’s heart squeeze painfully, and with one long look around him to make sure that no one is watching or near he reaches out his hand and gently touches Steve’s cheek. It turns into a solid hold as he lifts his head up to meet his eyes. Steve looks surprised but hopeful.

“It’s only two months. Lighten up, Steve.” He says the last part with a smile, like this distance doesn’t hurt him too.

Steve smiles, his hand covering Billy's.

"Yo! Steve!" It's Dustin's voice, but it's almost as though a fire has started as they both step away like they've been burned. A second later and Dustin is in the kitchen, he looks a little confused as his eyes land on Steve, then Billy. "Hopper's here. Everything okay?"

"Yeah." Billy speaks first. "Everything's fine, dipshit."

Billy walks out of the kitchen and Dustin's eyes land onto Steve. "You okay, buddy?"

"Yeah." Steve says not so convincingly. "Everything's fine."

He follows Billy's trail as he leave the kitchen. Dustin is left alone to shut the fridge door that is still wide open. His face scrunches up in confusion, then realization hits him. "Must be the hair."

17. "I Hope For Your life, You Forget About Mine."

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you enjoy this chapter. :) Comments are always appreciated. <3

"I hate this." Billy says as he walks on through the trees that tangle in his jacket and hair.

"We could have babysat. Nance and Jonathan could have done the sweep." Steve tells him as he swings his bat from right to left.

"Ha, right. Me babysitting."

"It's not that hard."

"Right... Mom Steve to the rescue." Billy says as he steps over a root.

"Shut up." Steve says rolling his eyes.

"What? Like it's not true. You took a beating for those kids. Says a lot."

"Well, yeah, but that's only because you were being an asshole."

"Watch it, Harrington." Billy threatens as he points his knife at Steve's chest.

Steve simply rolls his eyes and walks on ahead of the other teenager. The meeting was about forty minutes ago where everyone was updated on what was going. Apparently there has been sightings of some creature from Hawking's farmers. Sightings of a beast roaming the forest and eating off the livestock. Hopper wanted to take Jonathan to go and check a few places out, but Jonathan is Jonathan and it's not like Steve or Billy was just going to sit around to do nothing. They both volunteered to search Baker's lands while Hopper takes the McNeil's. Joyce went to the police station to gather the reports and take them back to Steve's where they were going to go through them. To try and find some correlation between the sightings with the mutilations. More than what they already know that is. It

left Jonathan to do the babysitting and Nancy to stay with them all with her new found gun, courtesy of Hopper, locked and loaded at the ready. Just in case.

“Fucking monsters. And that little girl a witch? What’s next, leprechauns?” Billy complains as they pass another oak.

“You didn’t have to come.” Steve tells him. “You could have went home.”

“Can’t. Dad thinks I’m supervising Maxine at the arcade.”

“He believes you?”

“What? Like Max is going to tell him I went out monster hunting?” Billy says with more snark than is necessary.

“Point taken.” Steve relents when an idea pops into his head. “Why don’t you come over to my place the next time she goes there?”

Billy huffs a weak laugh. “Right, like he wouldn’t know, least of all that there’s a possibility that Max would lie for me.”

“Not everyone is a jackass like you. Some are decent people. Max is one of them, she would do it.”

“Just drop it. Two fucking months, okay? Don’t get your panties in a twist. Soon I’ll be doing it for you.”

“Fuck off. That’s not what this is all about. There’s more to a rela- to this than sex.” Steve tries to tell him.

“Oh my God.” Billy says with a smirk. “You really think this is a relationship? Are you really that stupid or just delusional.”

Steve stops walking. “Fuck you. I know you feel it. This. Between us.”

“Why don’t we light some candles and have a good cry while we’re at it? Go shop for our monthlies supplies together.”

Steve laughs bitterly. “Everyone has feelings, jackass! Even you!”

It's like talking to a brick wall. Steve never gets anywhere with this, and yet they hug in the rain and screw like bunnies every Saturday. Or at least they used to. Billy would sometimes get this looks afterwards, or even during like he couldn't believe Steve was there. It was breathtaking and it made Steve's heart ache. He knows, he felt it and so did Billy. But Billy can't admit it. It's not like Steve is asking for much, all he wants is for Billy to admit it to himself, to him, not the whole Goddamn world.

Billy smirks, then suddenly without warning grabs Steve's jacket and pushes him up against a tree. "Feelings, huh?" He says with his mouth inches from Steve's.

"Yeah, Billy, feelings." Steve says breathless, his arms lax at his side. He knows Billy won't hurt him, not unless he asks. "You may be cold sometimes and self-involved but you're human, just like the rest of us."

Billy wastes no time in leaning in and attaching his lips to Steve's like a dying man looking for air. He bites and tugs and bruises as he searches for something. Steve is helpless against the onslaught, kissing back with as much ferocity as he can. Then there's tongue and a knee against his dick that is starting to take more and more interest. After so long without sex, without sex with Billy it's up and ready for action in record time. Sure he's jerked off here and there, but it's not the same. It never is.

Finally Billy pulls back and says, "Human? I'm more monster than human, baby. If you can't see that, than all your words about feelings and relationships are lies to make you feel good."

"Bil-"

Billy's finger comes up and traces along Steve's bottom lip. It shuts Steve up as Billy wipes across the small cut he left behind with his teeth. He wipes away the small amount of blood and shows it to Steve. "This is what love gets you, dear, blood and pain. I hope for your life you forget about mine. I'm just the guy who used you and beat your face until you were black and blue. You shouldn't forgive that."

Very slowly as though not to spook him, Steve reaches out his hand and takes Billy's. Billy looks pained and confused as Steve laces their fingers together. He doesn't move as Steve winds his other hand in Billy's hair. It's gentle and soft, but then he tugs and Billy's eyes that were closing against the genteel gesture open wide. He stares at Steve, his eyebrows scrunched together and eyes pained. Something passes between them, something that doesn't really need words, but Steve's always been a talker.

"But I do. I forgive you, Hargrove, and I've seen monsters. Hell, I've fought them, you aren't one. You're twisted up and lost. But aren't we all?"

Billy doesn't get to think about it for long before a noise coming from behind them both makes them detangle from each other. Steve's bat is at the ready as Billy's knife comes out in a ready grip. The noise of leaves and branches moving increases as does the sound of footsteps. The two teenagers share a glance with one another before the trees part in the darkness of the night and a demo-dog runs out. Steve is ready to take a swing when a shot rings out. The monster falls down with a whine and with one last twitch, stops moving.

Hopper appears seconds later, huffing and puffing out of breath. He must have ran here. He looks up to the boys and says bluntly, "Shit."

A growling from their left stops all three of them. Billy looks from Steve to Hopper, "Just one fucking stray, huh?"

Hopper looks just as panicked as the other two boys as he raises his gun to where the growl came from.

A second shot rings out.

18. "Please Forget Me, You Were Right, Dear. I Am Cold And Self-Involved."

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments are always appreciated and encourage me to write faster lol. :) <3

When they get back to the house they find that everyone has been waiting on edge for their return. They all tried watching a movie on Steve's VHS but most of them ended up talking through the whole affair or trying to help Joyce go through the police reports. Nancy and Jonathan not really seeing any point to them not knowing what was going on but Joyce tried her best to keep them away from it. It wasn't anything too gruesome, only a few witness accounts of what the farmer's saw on their land. They all tried to see if the dates had significance or if the accounts were exactly the same, what was different. Nobody wants to miss anything, especially not with what happened with Will. The whole pattern and path, it was like a big puzzle, who knows if this time isn't the same thing?

"What happened?"

"Are you guys okay?"

"Woah, is that blood!?"

The questions kept coming from the kids as all three of them walked into Steve's place. While they usually were at the Buyers, their group was getting a little big for Buyer's place. Steve's dad wouldn't be back until Graduation that is if he comes at all. His house all big and empty was the perfect place for them all to meet and use it as their headquarters for now. Everyone was still all in living room though, as big as it was too hold everyone, nobody really wanted to be alone. To be cornered of somewhere from the others. Something about it just screamed danger as Lucas pointed out to everyone earlier when that discussion was brought up.

"Alright! Quiet!" Hopper says as they make it through the door. "Everyone settle down."

His voice rings of authority and makes the kids shut up pretty quickly. Joyce makes her way to Hopper in the middle of the commotion, checking to see if he has any injuries as Hopper reassures her that they're fine. When she's done with him she looks over Steve and then Billy who has an unpleasant look on his face at the intrusion, but he doesn't push her away just tells her that he's fine. After she's satisfied she orders them all into the living room. Everyone takes a seat, Steve, Billy and Hopper practically falling into the couch cushions after everything they went through. All of them are beyond exhausted.

"Fuck, I could use a beer." Billy says as he wipes some black goo off of his forehead. Usually by now he would be lighting up a cigarette but he's not, Steve notices. Must be because of what Dustin said about his mild case of asthma that is pretty much non-existent now. He reminds himself to talk to Billy about it later, that it's okay if he does smoke. That it doesn't bother him anymore.

"Billy Hargrove!" Joyce yells, startling everyone including Billy. "Watch your mouth, there's kids here."

"Mom..." Will whispers a little annoyed at being called a kid.

"Sorry, ma'am." Billy says, looking properly reprimanded. Steve almost does a double take at that.

"Good." Joyce says. "Will, Dustin, get these boys a beer. Only one."

She stresses that last part as the boys get up to do just that. "And one for Jim!" She calls out to them as they disappear into the kitchen. Billy looks surprised but almost smiles.

"Thanks, Joyce." Steve says to her.

"Don't thank me, it's your beer. I'm sorry I should have asked."

"No, no, it's fine. My home is your home." Steve says it sincerely, remembering all the times she made him feel at home, made him feel loved like he had a mother again. Almost everyone could agree on that here. Joyce has done more for them than anyone, being the parent they never had, caring and *there*.

“Thanks buddy.” Steve says to Dustin as he hands him a cold one, already open.

“Yeah, yeah.” Dustin says as he and Will give the remaining beers to Hopper and Billy. “Now tells us what happened. Did you find it? I mean, you’re covered in goo so you must have. Was it like Dart? Did it like the candy bars I packed for you!?”

“That was you?” Steve says not really that surprised as he remembers the multiple candy bars that appeared in his jacket, noticing it only on the way back.

Dustin looks sheepish. “So did it work?”

“No, kid, they didn’t.” Hopper says for Steve. “They were more interested in us. As food.”

“Jim, they didn’t...” Joyce trails off.

“We’re fine. Shot them before they could get too close. The third one, these boys took care of it.” He half raises his beer to them in gratitude. Steve looks slightly embarrassed at the attention while Billy looks smug, making Hopper regret the moment slightly, but not overly. He doesn’t know much about this Hargrove kid, only that he’s Maxine’s older brother and he beat the shit out of Steve early this year. Jane says that it’s all okay now, that Billy is okay, that he needs their help, but Hopper’s still not sure.

“So Steve saved your ass, huh?” Max says with a teasing smile.

“Shut up, Maxine, I saved his.” Billy says a little angry, not really understanding that she’s only kidding.

“Kids, language.” Joyce warns, but now they’re glaring at each other and Steve knows enough to know that is probably not going to end well.

“She’s only messing with you, man, let it go.” Steve says, his hand on Billy’s shoulder.

Billy pushes his arm off of him. “Sure, after she apologizes.”

"I have nothing to apologize for." Max's mood shifts from teasing to angry. Billy always does this, always turns everything into a fight.

"Alright, both of you need some space." Hopper steps in now, but it's too late, Billy's anger grows. It's not just Max, but probably everything, he's not really sure. Sometimes he just gets so angry he doesn't know who he is anymore. He doesn't recognize himself. He sees the monster buried underneath come up for some air. It leaves a mess and it breaks.

Everyone flinches as Billy throws a beer behind him at the fireplace. It smashes onto the brick and glass goes flying everywhere. Luckily nothing too close to anyone. Beer spills out and seeps down into the carpet. Billy takes a step toward Max and that's when Steve steps in, getting in-between them. Nancy and Jonathan, knowing the history between them aren't really sure if they should do anything. The adults on the other hand are already acting. Hopper is beside him in a flash, blocking Steve from Billy to protect him. It seems so silly to Steve, Hopper protecting him from Billy. Billy would never hurt him, not ever.

"Calm down, son. Go get some air." Hopper tells him, but it's more of an order than anything else.

"I'm not your son." Billy bites out, but he doesn't argue he just walks through the living room toward the door. Before he leaves he stops and calls out behind him, "Come on Max. Time to go home."

Joyce's protective instincts cut in as she says, "We'll take her home."

There's no room for argument and Billy doesn't even try as he slams the front door behind him. There's a moment of tense silence between everyone before Dustin says, "Evil."

"Shut up, Dustin." Steve says as he follows Billy out of the house, surprising almost everyone in the room.

"Wait! Billy, wait!" Steve calls after him as he steps into the night air. Billy has his front door open, ready to jump in and drive away, but he stops when he hears Steve.

“What!?” He says angrily, but it’s more at himself than anything. “What the hell do you want from me, Harrington!?”

And it’s not just in this moment he’s talking about Steve realizes. He’s talking about in general, about everything, about their relationship. He’s talking about what Steve wants from him.

“Nothing, I- I just want you.” Steve says honestly and a little confused.

“Well, this is me! The asshole!” Billy says with tears in his voice, but they’re gone before they even began. “You were right, dear. I am cold and self-involved. I break things, I’ll break you. Count on it.”

He says it bitterly and Steve doesn’t know what to say to it. It’s the same argument they’ve always had, just dressed differently. What is he supposed to say it? How can he make Billy understand that he’s worth this? That he’s not going to fuck it up if he just tries. That he’s not going to break him. That Steve knows he would never hurt him. He just wouldn’t, sure he’s hurting him now but he would never really hurt him.

“Billy...” Steve tries, but it’s too late. Billy is getting in his car and then he’s driving away. Steve lets him physically, but mentally he’s vowing to figure this out. To make Billy understand that they can do this, that even if it’s hard they have a chance. Everyone does.

And that Billy has a chance at something more, something real, and something healthy. Not just a relationship, but for himself. That he doesn’t have to be angry, that he can learn how to be better if he wants to. And even if he doesn’t, Steve will still want him, will still love him. Because how can he not?

19. "I'll Write My Loneliness In Poems, If I Can Just Think How To Start."

"This is so stupid." Steve says in frustration. "We're seniors and we're still writing poems? So dumb."

"I think it's kind of nice." Jonathan says timidly beside Steve.

They're at Steve's house, doing homework on a Thursday night as well as putting in a couple hours to study. Nancy insisted on it even though Steve complained of how he's not up for it. Even though they're not dating and have gravitated towards friends, she's still a little pushy about school work. Making sure that he studies enough and writes well for his classes. It's annoying is what it is and who told her to care so much? Jonathan of course is on her side, but Steve can hardly blame him, he knows that he wants to be able to get a good job to take care of his mom and Will.

"Steve, I told you to take period five English." Nancy says. "Mr. Henry is a much better English teacher, no offense to Mrs. Allen."

"Mrs. Allen is great, Nance, besides she doesn't make us do three essays a week."

Nancy simply rolls her eyes at that comment, knowing that he knows full well that it's not that much. Mrs. Allen is more of a lovey dovey, writing is your oyster kind of teacher, and where as Mr. Henry is more analytical fact checker kind of English teacher. They had this same argument at the beginning of the year when they were picking classes, when they were dating. It seems so long ago now that Steve thinks about it. He remembers that he was going to change it to be in Nancy's class, not because he wanted that teacher but because Nancy would be there and she would let him copy her notes. He never did change it though, especially not after they broke up.

"Well, you chose her Steve, so you have to write the poem." Nancy says matter-of-fact.

"I'll write my loneliness in poems, if I can just think how to start." Steve says a little bitterly, it grabs the attention of both Nancy and

Jonathan. They both know how Steve has been struggling with Billy lately, not to mention the little escapade of the beer bottle being thrown at the fire place last Friday. Neither of them has brought it up with Steve, waiting for him to say something if he wants to.

“I’m sorry, Steve.” Nancy decides to say, not really sure if anything else would be accepted by him right now.

“It’s not your fault, Nancy.” Steve tells her. “I just- I know that he wants- but I don’t know how to show him that it’s worth it, you know?”

He’s speaking to both Nancy and Jonathan now, trying to make them understand where he’s coming from. They both nod their heads, thinking of their own relationship. How they both had feelings for each other but weren’t sure how to bring it up. How to let the other know that it was worth it. Even if it would hurt people. People like Steve. They both feel a stab of guilt for that, probably always will, but Steve has a chance to be happy here. Or that’s what Jonathan believes, Nancy on the other hand, she knows Steve can do better.

“Well, maybe if you showed him that it’s not so bad being together.” Jonathan says. “That you can make it work.”

“I don’t know how to do that.” Steve says miserably. “It’s like he thinks he’s some kind of monster or something.”

“Well, he’s not wrong.” Nancy half whispers as she turns a page of her textbook.

“What?”

Nancy looks up, a little guilty. “I know you care about him, Steve, and maybe he isn’t always an asshole, but you can do better. There’s better people out there for you.”

“Nancy.” Steve says surprised, but not overly so. “I can’t- There is no one else for me.”

Nancy looks a little skeptical but nods her head. “If you really feel that way Steve... But Billy isn’t that great of a person. You have to know that.”

"You don't see what I see, Nancy, he can be a good man. I can feel it."

"Okay." Nancy says after a few tense moments of silence. "But I'll be watching him and if he-

"He would never hurt me, Nance." Steve says sincerely and honestly.

"He's hurting you now."

Steve can't really argue with that one.

"Uhh..." Jonathan starts, his face apologetic and fearful. "I- I think there's something I should tell you."

Steve looks to his friend, confused as to what he could say. "What is it?"

"When- after you were in the bathroom. When Billy left..."

"Yeah?"

"Well, later that day I was in the gym locker room and I saw him naked." Jonathan says as his face heats up embarrassed. Nancy looks hurt as she jumps to the worst possible scenario. Jonathan looks panicked as he notices her face and quickly says, "Not like that. I- I just saw him an- and there were bruises everywhere. H- He looked pretty beat up. N- Nothing on his face. He threatened me, and I told him I wouldn't say anything."

Nancy looks horrified, but Steve doesn't get it. "So? He got into a fight. What's the big deal?"

"Steve..." Nancy says gently.

"It's- He didn't get into a f- fight, Steve." Jonathan tells him in a calm voice. "He was beaten."

"So he lost a fight, never thought he could but what does it matter?"

"Steve." Nancy says it in such a sorry voice that Steve grows a little angry. She rests her hand on his arm and he flinches away, standing

up.

“No. No. What are you trying to say? Just tell me.” Steve says looking at them both, his heart falling into his stomach.

“It was probably his dad.” Jonathan says, his eyes locked onto the ground. Nancy’s hand rests on Jonathan’s shoulder now and he lets it.

Horrifying thoughts race through Steve’s head as he feels disgusted and guilty, and so, so sorry. Then there’s the anger as he looks to Jonathan. “Why didn’t you tell me this before!?”

“Steve!” Nancy yells back as Jonathan looks like he’s about to hyperventilate.

“No, Nance. Why didn’t you tell me?” His voice is hurt as he directs the question to Jonathan.

“I- I promised him.” Jonathan says, his breathing picking up. “I couldn’t- He wouldn’t want anyone to know. I don’t want anyone to know.”

It clicks then and Steve feels like a house is falling on him. Of course, Jonathan’s father. It makes so much sense now, why Joyce hates him, why Jonathan is scared of him. Why they both protect Will like he is the only good thing left. The only person left untainted. Steve feels his heart fall into his chest as he runs to the kitchen to get a paper bag. He kneels down and holds it up to Jonathan’s mouth, telling him to breathe.

He doesn’t fully understand why Jonathan wouldn’t want to tell him, but he gets it. He understands enough to feel sorry and lose that anger toward him. If there’s anyone he should be angry at it’s Billy’s dad. And angry he is. There’s no way that he’ll let Billy and Max stay there any longer. Max. God, she never said anything. Not once.

“Just breathe, Jonathan, it’s okay.” Steve tells him in what he hopes is a soothing voice, even though inside of him is anything but. “Just breathe.”

20. "I Still Worry More About You."

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments are always appreciated. <3

"Hurry up, Maxine!" Billy yells out to the empty hallway where his stepsister should be making her way to the front door and out to Billy's car.

"I'm coming! Jeez!" She yells from her room as Billy opens the front door and waits impatiently.

"We're going to be late!"

"Like you care." Max says quietly as she walks through the hall to the front door. She slips on her sneakers and heads out to the car.

"Neil does, so next time hurry the hell up, alright?" Billy says but it's more of a threat than anything as he shuts the front door and jumps into his car.

Max simply rolls her eyes as he backs out of the driveway and makes his way to the middle school. He grips the steering wheel as he prepares to ask, "So, is there another meeting soon? About these hell beasts?"

Max scoffs. "Why? So that you can throw another beer bottle?"

Billy wants to jerk the steering wheel to the side and make her think twice about saying shit like that, but God help him he can hear Steve's voice in the back of his head. Telling him to calm down and not to hurt Max. Not to endanger her, like he ever really did before. He was simply having a little fun, but then Steve found out through Max and he gave him shit. Which he didn't take, thank you very much, but somehow it has seeped into his subconscious. So instead he tightens his grip on the steering wheel and tries to count to ten like some fucking fairy.

"No." Billy says after a few uncomfortable long moments of him trying to not throw this car into overdrive. "I just wanted to know. I

killed one of them, remember? I think I'm entitled to having a fucking heads up if I have a target on my back now."

Max looks slightly surprised, not by what he said but about what he didn't say. He didn't have some snarky comeback nor did he swerve the car almost into a ditch. It's strange for Billy and something Max was not expecting to come or therefore not to come from him. To be fair though, over the past few months Billy has changed a little. He's been a little less aggressive. He even joked with her a couple of times, at least that's what she thought it was, but then the beer bottle thing happened and well, then she wasn't sure. Still isn't, but with Billy she really doesn't know what to expect from him, never really did.

"Tonight. We're all going to Steve's again." Max says honestly. "Joyce told me to tell you last week that you can come as long as you don't freak out again. Also Hopper wants to talk to you... Don't know why anyone would give you another chance but..."

It feels like a cage of bats have been let loose in Billy's stomach. He doesn't show it, he never does, but he gets nervous. Especially when the chief of police wants to talk to him personally. Logically he knows that it's probably only to threaten him about the beer bottle where he has to promise to never do it again. More, 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir.' He can do that, it will be easy, besides he's used to it, isn't he? And as long as Steve just backs off... Who is he kidding, Steve fucking Harrington learning to shut up? Not likely.

"See you after school." Max says as Billy pulls up to the middle school.

"Wait." Billy says, stopping her from opening the door all the way and getting out. "What time is the meeting?"

"Seven." Max says. "We eat and then we go over. Steve was going to give me a ride since mom and Neil are gone, and I thought you'd be going out. There's a party at some guy named Tommy's house, right?"

"How'd you know about that? Never mind, Tommy's an asshole. I'll take you."

“Really?” She asks skeptically.

“Yes, really. Now get out.”

She’s obviously unhappy about it but doesn’t comment further as she gets out of his car and skates away to her friends. Billy watches her go into the school before pulling out and driving over to the high school a couple blocks away. Once he’s in the parking lot, the reality of tonight seeps in. He’ll have to talk to the chief of police, and he’ll have to see Steve. Steve with his big brown doe sad eyes asking him why they can’t work things out. Why he’s still with that bitch Alice. Doesn’t he understand? Doesn’t he get it? He doesn’t want to be with her, he has to. His dad needs to believe he’s not a faggot, not some queer. That he’s normal. It’s the only way he can stop the hits from coming onto Steve or Max or even fucking Susan. He doesn’t have any answers for Steve. Steve just needs to back off and leave it alone. He told him maybe in the summer, but if he’s honest with himself he knows this will never end. How can it?

“What the fuck?” Billy half yells as a banging on his passenger window makes him jump out of his thoughts. He looks to see who it is and once he does he can’t help but let out a cynical chuckle. Steve fucking Harington. He’s fucking everywhere, in his thoughts, in everyone’s words, and right in fucking front of him.

“Open the door.” Steve says through the window.

Billy wants to ignore him, to tell him to fuck off but now there’s people looking at them. They’re staring, probably asking themselves why the fuck they’re talking to each other. Why Steve looks so frantic and Billy so pissed off. After all, the rumour about them is that Billy beat the shit out of Steve. Why would they be talking to each other? What the hell is going on? By lunch people will be spreading even more rumours, this time with a whole lot less honesty and more imagination.

“Finally.” Steve says as the car door opens and he sits inside.

“What the fuck is this Steve?” Billy says as he puts out the cigarette he was smoking on the way here.

"I- I need to talk to you."

"Then talk."

"Billy, I- Jonathan told me." Steve says, cutting right to the chase, his eyes full of hurt. "About seeing you in the locker room."

A stab of fear slices its way through Billy, making him freeze before he tries with obvious forced humour, "Jealous, huh?"

"Billy, he told me about the bruises." Steve says softly.

"Yeah, I got in a fight." Billy says it with a hollow voice.

"Just because we're not together like that, it doesn't mean that I don't still worry more about you. You're not safe. Please, just talk to Hopper, he can help."

Billy can't help it, he laughs. He laughs with bitter resentment and years of broken promises for the pain to end. "Sure he can." It's not quite an acceptance of what he's accused, but it's close enough for Steve.

"Please." Steve whispers brokenly. He doesn't try to reach out for Billy, or to show any other emotion with his body, his voice tells it all.

"Get out of my car."

"Billy..."

"Get, the fuck out of my car, Harrington." Billy says, the threat evident in his tone.

Steve knows that Billy won't hurt him, but he doesn't know what he should do. He's just a kid after all. He doesn't have all of the answers. And doing this, badgering Billy, he's not going to get anywhere. Billy's too damn stubborn. So he gets out of the car, but as soon as the door is shut Billy is out of the parking lot. Driving off somewhere that Steve can only hope he will return from.

21. "I Am Rude And Unkind."

Notes for the Chapter:

Did you think I gave up on this story? If so, me too, but I'm back. New chapter! This story will continue, may take me a while to update sometimes, but I will finish it. Enjoy!

He's angry, unbelievably so. He wishes that Steve would just mind his own shit and stop sniffing around his. That stupid Jonathan. He wasn't supposed to say anything, hell he promised. Which is a dumb thing to hold onto, but Billy did threaten him and he thought that was enough. It's probably that bitch Nancy that made him talk, she probably told him she would protect him from him. Getting some woman to do the dirty work in the relationship, what a pussy. No wonder Harrington wanted nothing to do with them both, them fucking probably was only icing on the cake. It was better that way, Steve was alone and didn't have some girl telling him what to do. Friends or more it's her and Jonathan who are telling him how to act. How to get on his nerves, to find out what's going on. It's none of their fucking business anyway, they're just making things worse. Billy hates them all the more for that.

"Fuck." Billy whispers to himself as he shakes his head away from those thoughts. He grips his steering wheel tightly and slows down on the gas. He's been driving for a while now, out of sight of the school and almost out of town. He knows that he'll have to go back, for Maxine and Susan's sake, which is a stupid reason. He shouldn't care, they're nothing to him. They're not his blood and they've done nothing for him, he should just leave them behind and never look back. But he can't, and that thought alone makes him want to punch and kick until his fists are numb. Until everything is numb. But he can't, all he can do is drive until he has to turn back. He hates himself for that, even though he should hate Neil, he hates himself. It's all his fault. For caring, for his mother. All his fault.

"Shit!" Billy yells as he slams his foot onto the break, the sudden appearance of the kid in the middle of the road breaking him out of his thoughts harshly. He ends up stopping mere inches from the kid

who seems unfazed by the screeching car almost hitting her. Her nonchalance is angering in its own right, especially since she's old enough to know better, almost making Billy a murderer on top of everything else. "What the fuck."

She moves quickly coming up to the passenger door and opening, stepping inside. She doesn't seem really 'there'. It's eerie, and Billy's pretty sure the last time he saw her at one of those meetings she was talking that kid Mike's ear off. She doesn't seem to really register him as she stares ahead and says, "Drive."

"No fucking way." Is Billy's quick response. "What the fuck are you doing here, kid?"

"My name is Jane. I need to find my sister." Jane says, then she turns her head and meets Billy's confused eyes. "You're running away. Me too."

"No fucking way." Billy says once it sinks in what she's implying. "I'm taking you back to school."

He starts to back up and turn around but his car suddenly stops. He tries to push down on the gas but it's like an invisible foot is stuck on the break. "What the fuck..." He looks around trying to pinpoint or understand who or what is doing this when he notices the girl. Her eyes are focused and she's deep in concentration. Then Billy remembers the conversation back at Steve's place at that meeting where they explained she's some kind of witch, or mage. Billy didn't really believe, or he did, seeing her levitate one object for a couple of seconds, but other than that he wasn't one hundred percent certain she was what they were describing.

"Stop messing with my car!" He yells at her.

"No." She says. "Not going home."

"Look, kid, you're father or adoptive whatever is the chief of fucking police. I'm not getting arrested for kidnapping a minor."

"Drive. Or I will."

Now that is a threat very close to Billy's heart, his baby is not

something he needs this witch girl to mess with. Who knows the damage that she can do? He wants to tell her to go to hell but he'll be going there if the car gets wrecked, so it's with an uneasy mind that he says, "Fine," and starts driving away from the town. The girl seems strangely satisfied with it but Billy's still fuming with anger. He turns on his tape and cranks the volume as Led Zeppelin's 'Dazed and Confused' plays.

"Fucking kids." He mutters under his breath, then asks said kid, "So where are we going?"

"To sister." She simply states.

"Yeah, that's very specific. I need directions, a destination."

"Turn left."

He squints at her annoyed but turns left at the next crossroad and scoffs as he sees the sign to the big city. Great. He takes out a cigarette and lights up. This is going to be so much fun. "I hate this road trip already. Why didn't you get dear old dad to take you? You know, Hopper?"

"He said no."

"Figures."

"Why are you running? Why do you hurt Steve?" She asks.

He wants to speed up or hit something as the anger thunders in his veins, but this is a kid, even if she is incredibly annoying. Instead he says, "I am rude and unkind. Just who I am."

She peers at him confused and unconvinced. "No. No it's not."

"Fuck off. Like you said I hurt Steve. I hurt people." Billy says between clenched teeth and more aggressive puffs from his cigarette.

"You hurt Steve. You tell him you don't care. You do."

Billy shakes his head but doesn't dispute it, knowing that arguing with her is pointless. "Whatever."

"Papa hurt me." She says after a few moments of silence.

"Hopper?" Billy asks his fist getting ready for the beating he's going to dish out.

"No, papa. He has white hair. He took me and hurt me. Your papa hurt you. Now you hurt others. I hurt people too."

Billy relaxes a little as he realizes she's talking about somebody else.
"Where is he? You're papa?"

"Gone."

"Good."

"Yours isn't. Gone, he isn't gone." She says.

"He'll never be gone." He tells her honestly as he relaxes his defenses a little. This kid may be annoying but she understands on a level that no one ever has before.

"Mine is. Now I have a new father. Maybe you can too."

Billy smiles almost painfully. "It's too late for me."

"Steve doesn't think so."

Billy doesn't know how to respond to that. He knows that they're now talking about something else, but he can't say anything to it. Instead he lights up another cigarette and continues down this dirt road, hoping that this is over soon.

22. "It's Been Four Years And It Does Not End."

School was hell, Steve could barely focus on anything. He knows he should have been paying extra attention due to final examinations coming up in a couple of weeks, but he couldn't, not with the lingering thoughts of Billy in the back of his mind. The way he evaded all of his questions, the way he got angry, and him driving away to God knows where. Steve is pretty sure he'll just show up to school tomorrow, or head home that night and have Max tell him that he's fine, but a small part of him isn't so sure. He knows that Billy has a temper, but he also knows that Billy prides himself on someone who's not a coward. Someone who will stand their ground and take it... Now, thinking about it and with this new information Steve finally understands why that is. It makes him want to throw a beer bottle too.

"Hey, Steve!" It's Jonathan who catches Steve at the end of the day by his car. He was expecting Nancy but she's nowhere to be found, probably at some study group again. Usually Jonathan joins her but not always.

"Jonathan, hey." Steve says, still distracted and itching to get home in case Billy might have gone there.

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah. I gotta go. Did you need a ride...?"

"No." He says quickly. "Nancy is- she's at study group I'm going there right away I just- Go easy on Billy, okay?"

Now that's something he thought he'd never hear from anyone. It surprises him but not overly so as he knows the similar history Billy and Jonathan have. "I will."

Maybe he hadn't.

"Okay. Good." Jonathan says. "I'll see you later."

"Yeah." The he's gone and Steve's left to wonder about how he

treated Billy this morning as he gets in his car and drives home.

He wasn't aggressive, was he? He just told him that Jonathan told him about the bruises and how he knew what was going on. He didn't think it was harsh, he was pretty calm considering how angry he really felt at Billy's dad, at the whole situation. He did mention Hopper though, maybe that was what set him off. He didn't mean it to sound like a threat. Maybe that's what Billy thought it was? He wouldn't go behind his back, but he wants Billy to be safe and what about Max? Or Susan? There's no way a guy like that only hits his own kid. Besides Hopper is a friend, he would believe him. He would help and do something. Why can't Billy see that?

"Shit. Billy, where are you?" He's pulled up to his house and Billy's car is nowhere to be seen. He could be at home but Steve seriously doubts that, especially after what he knows now, but maybe he should call Max just in case. He'd use the walkie-talkie but Max got grounded and hers was confiscated for the next week after she went out to one of their meetings for a little too long. He'll have to call her instead, but when he walks through the door his phone is already ringing, which is rare in itself. If the kids need to contact him they use the walkie-talkies, and Nancy and Jonathan are at study group. No one else would be calling here, unless...

"Hello?" He asks quickly.

"Steve?" His heart falls into his chest. It's not Hopper with news, it's his father.

"Hey, dad."

"Hello, son. I wanted to call and let you know I'll be home at the end of June in time for your graduation."

"You will?" Steve sounds surprised even to his own ears but he is, he wasn't expecting his dad to come. He usually misses his birthdays and sometimes holidays. Right now its busy season for his father's company, he usually can't take the time, or doesn't want to.

"Of course. I'm not your mother, Steve, I'll always be there for you." At the mention of his mom, Steve's heart squeezes painfully. "Besides

I called the principal and your grades are improving. I'm very proud of you. Now, the collage you applied for in the city for business will see your improvements and I'm sure they'll have your name closer to the top of the list."

"Thanks dad." Steve says weakly as he remembers all those applications Nancy made him fill out and mail. He didn't want to, but he had to. His dad is expecting him to follow in his footsteps, but the truth is Steve hates business and economics. In actuality, even though he's not that great at it he kind of loves English. Once he got Mrs. Allen this year it's been easier, she actually explains what a sonnet is even though he should have learned it a couple of years ago. She doesn't make you feel stupid for not knowing or understanding right away. He's going to miss her class the most.

"I'll see you soon."

"Right. Bye-" Steve hears the click of the phone, telling him that his dad has already hung up. "...Dad."

He doesn't get to ponder on the conversation for long as the phone starts ringing again almost immediately. Steve is hesitant this time to pick up but after the fifth ring decides to anyway, figuring it must be important. "Yeah?"

"Finally, Harrington. Nancy talking your ear off again?"

"Billy!?"

"Yeah, it's me. Hold onto your panties." Billy says with some snark.

"Where the hell are you?" Steve asks almost frantically.

"Uhh... About that... Look, just- I need you to tell Hopper that Jane is fine."

"Eleven?"

"Yeah, Jane or Eleven or whatever. She's fine, we went on a little road trip but- look just tell him not to send out a search party, okay? I don't need kidnapping on my arrest record." Billy tells him as the sound of a car goes by on the other end.

“Yeah, okay. But Billy-”

“Look, it’s been four years and it does not end. I can handle it. Just leave it alone... For telling Hopper about Jane, thanks.”

The line goes dead and Steve is left holding the phone as the dial tone rings in his ear.

23. "I Still Felt Alone, But I Knew That You'd Be There."

Notes for the Chapter:

I struggled with this chapter, but I think it's good enough to post... And the plot is getting real, isn't it? Don't worry that will slow down soon, we need more Billy and Steve. It's their story after all.

If you ask Billy, the whole reunion thing between Jane and her 'sister' was just a little too cliché for him. After all they don't even look the same or anywhere in the same age range. Maybe they're half-sisters? Maybe they're not even sisters at all but just call each other that? Billy's not really sure and he doesn't really care, obviously there was a reason Jane came to him to find her. There's a reason that Hopper didn't drive her down here himself. Whether it's too dangerous or because he's overprotective there has to be a reason. Maybe she's some fugitive? Billy does vaguely remember Steve saying something about an experiment and the government but Billy wasn't really listening. He was too focused on Steve's dick at the time, besides all that conspiracy talk? It's crazy. He knew a couple of people in California who talked like that although way more so and they were batshit.

"Jane..." Kali says softly, not really believing her eyes. They're in some dump of an apartment building on the fifth floor. It's clear that she doesn't have much money and is just scraping by, or so that's how it appears to Billy. "You're here."

"Sister, I need your help." Jane says as they hug tightly then pull away.

"I never thought I'd see you again."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, we're family. I forgive you." Kali says earnestly, but there's pain beneath it despite her encouraging words of forgiveness. "What happened with your friends? Were you able to save them?"

“Yes. I still felt alone, but I knew that you’d be there. In here.” She points to her heart and any pain Kali still held disappears.

“I’m glad that you did it.”

“Thank you. But something’s going on. Something bigger.” Jane tells her with desperation.

“You’ve felt it too.” Kali says with a now uncertain voice.

“Yes.”

Billy’s not really sure about this whole other sister thing and whatever they’re talking about probably has to do with those demon dogs but it’s none of his business. In fact he really doesn’t give a crap unless they start attacking him so he says he needs to use the John and gets out of there. It’s not a lie he really does have to go, but he’s also sort of freaking out. Not because of Jane and her baggage but because of Steve. He called him, he did because he didn’t need the chief of police sending out a search party but he could have called Max. Hell he could have called Wheeler but he didn’t, he called Steve. He hates himself a little for that, for how much he needed to hear his voice. For how much he needed Steve.

It seems ridiculous to say that he needs someone. He’s been alone his whole life, taking care of himself. He’s never needed anyone, not ever. He’s dealt with his mom, with her death and then his dad. His beatings, his *discipline*, and his stupid fucking rules. He’s dealt with the new stepmom who lets it happen just like everyone else and this stepsister who he has to look out for. Like she needs anyone, like he ever did. He’s dealt with it all alone, then Steve fucking Harrington comes along. King Steve who liked to have it rough just like him. A quick fuck here and there until he started holding him closer and wanting more. He knew that Steve couldn’t handle it. He knew that Steve doesn’t know how to deal with being alone, how to be alone, not like Billy. He shouldn’t be surprised that Steve held on so hard. He should have known. He’s not even angry at him, not really, he’s angrier at himself for letting it happen for so long. Letting Steve get attached.

Steve. Steve. Steve. It doesn’t matter how attached he is even though

it kind of is the whole point, the problem now is that he knows. He knows what his father has been doing to him, the bruises and the wounds. Jonathan told him and he knows now. Steve is too much of a good person to do nothing. He thinks he has all the answers that something needs to be done about it. Billy knows that once he goes back that something is going to have to give. He knows that Steve won't be able to let it go. Him and his big fucking bleeding heart. This is the guy who-

"Please!" It's Jane.

Billy splashes water on his face trying to push away the thoughts of Steve and what he has to go back to in Hawkins, and walks out of the room toward the 'sisters'. When Billy rounds the corner from the hallway into the living room, if you can call it that with its broken couch and old table, they're staring at each other, and Jane seems frantic. Billy immediately walks up closer to Jane, half his body covering her from Kali's view. He looks to the girl and asks with his arms crossed over his chest, "What the hell is going on here?"

"None of your business." Kali tells him as she looks past him to Jane.

"Yeah, it is." Billy says forcefully.

There's a long moment of silence before Jane breaks it saying, "She won't help."

"Great. Can we go then?"

"No. I need to show her."

"What?" Billy asks as he looks to her. He doesn't get an answer or have any time to say anything else as Jane walks forward and places her hand on Kali's head. Billy wants to ask what she is doing but it only takes a second before Kali steps back in a dazed state. It quickly dissipates and a look of fear overtakes her. She starts breathing heavily and Jane is quick at her side. Kali pushes her away and looks to her angry.

"What the hell was that?" Kali asks. "Are you putting tricks into my mind?"

“No. It’s real, and it’s coming.” Jane tells her sadly. “Will you help?”

Kali pauses for a long time then nods. “I’ll look for them, for the others. But I can’t do it alone.”

Jane nods in agreement as Kali eyes Billy. “Are you going to be alright with him?”

“I’m right here, Princess.” Billy says annoyed but she only ignores him, looking to Jane for an answer.

Jane pauses briefly before looking to Billy.

“Yes.”

24. "I Loved Her More Than I Love Myself."

Notes for the Chapter:

New tags have been added, please read them before continuing.

It was dark when they finally got back on the road driving to some other city that Jane herself wasn't even sure where it is let alone what the name of it is. According to her she had to feel it out. Billy wanted to call bullshit on sixth sense and all that psychic crap but after seeing the way she can control his car he decides wisely against it. Instead he drives on, when in truth he wants nothing more than to turn around and head back to Hawkins. This was supposed to be a quick drive to the city to take Jane to her 'sister' and for him to get away from his problems, mainly from Steve, but now it's turned into some week long road trip which even Billy knows is not good. He's driving with a minor whose guardian is the chief of police. This can't end well.

"Why are we stopping?" Jane asks confused as Billy pulls up to a gas station that is attached to a small restaurant.

"Need more smokes." Billy says. "And some more fuel. You hungry?"

Jane considers it and says, "Yes."

Billy was expecting that answer, knowing how both of them have hardly eaten anything all day, discounting the cookies at Kali's. Her fridge wasn't very full and Billy wasn't sure if he really wanted to ask for something more to eat, knowing how Jane has these abilities, it stands to reason that her 'sister' does too. Jane on the other hand was too wrapped up in her conversation with Kali to probably even notice that she was hungry. Bottom line they both needed to eat and Billy needed something to pass the time if he's going to be forced to drive this kid another hundred miles or so.

"Burger and fries work for you, kid?"

"Yes."

Billy nods his head and gets out. He grabs the pump and unlatches the nozzle, filling her with gas. He waits until it's full before heading into the gas station store. He tells the clerk he's at number two and goes to grab a pack of smokes. As he does so he notices the cough syrup and aspirin lined up on the shelf. He looks around almost like he's expecting to find that Jane has wondered out of the car and into the store but she's not there. He can clearly see her in his Camaro fiddling with the radio. He watches her for a couple seconds longer than necessary to make sure she's not going to turn and look at him. Once he's satisfied he reaches for the cough syrup and places it on the counter next to the smokes.

"Is that everything?" The guy asks and Billy nods.

"Finally." Jane says as Billy steps into the car. He hands her the food and puts the key in the ignition.

"So sorry, Princess for the wait but it takes a while to make a good burger." Billy tells her.

Jane doesn't respond at first as she takes a bite of her burger. Once her mouth is full she says, "Thank you."

"Yeah, yeah. Here, I got you a Cola."

He puts it in her cup holder and drives off down the road, reaching into the bag for his own burger as he does so. "Do you have any idea where we're heading?"

"West."

"Yeah, I got that Nancy Drew, but what's the town's name?"

"I don't know." She says as she eats her burger hungrily.

"Great. You know it would be kind of useful to know where the hell I'm driving too. I'm not exactly a fan of driving you around." Billy tells her a little angrily as he remembers her driving his car for him with her psychic abilities if you can call it that.

"I know. I'm sorry." It sounds sincere and Billy starts to feel a little guilty for what he's doing or is about to do but that stops short as he

thinks of an angry Hopper arresting him.

“Yeah, whatever. Why is this so important anyway? I thought you closed the rift or whatever the hell it was.”

“I did, but once things get through it leaves residue. Something’s trying to get through, that residue is allowing it to.”

It still doesn’t make sense to Billy but it sounds bad and he doesn’t want some big monster eat-for-all buffet but him and Jane can’t go out their own. To try and beat this on their own. That would be suicide, besides back in Hawkins there’s a whole group of them ready to be the hero and fight these monsters. Huh, monsters, how strange it sounds even after everything Billy’s seen. It doesn’t even sound real in his own mind. Anyway, let them be the heroics, he’s not anything like that. He’s just a guy with a car and a shitty father.

“So your ‘sister’... You haven’t see her in a while, huh?” Billy asks. It’s not that he cares much but he’s a little curious. Steve never told him much about this mysterious Jane who is also known by a number. All he knows is that she is or was a part of some experiment, that she has psychic like abilities, and that she didn’t appear in their lives until about a year or so ago- maybe two.

“Yes. A few months. Before that many years.” Jane explains.

“So... You have the same father or was she adopted?”

“Yes, papa.”

“That asshole?” At Jane’s nod Billy shakes his head. “Glad he’s dead.”

Jane doesn’t say anything to that, she only balls up the wrapper where her burger was and throws it in the empty bag. Fries were too much for Billy’s small budget so only burgers it was, and the Cola of course which Jane now takes a large sip from. She continues to drink for a few minutes as Billy drives, trying his best not to stare at her and the drink.

“What about your mom?” Billy asks.

“She’s gone.” Jane states sadly looking out the window. “I loved her.

Did you love your mom?"

No one's really ever asked him about his mom before, well that's not true, Steve did once but he walked away from that conversation quickly. Now that he's in a moving car that he's driving he can't really do that. The pain that's always there surfaces instead and Billy can't help but say, "I loved her more than I love myself."

Jane tries to smile but her eyes are drooping as she leans her head against the car door. The drink almost falls from her hand but Billy quickly grabs it before it can spill. He puts it back in the cup holder as Jane falls asleep, or more accurately unconscious. Billy sighs in relief, finally. He slows down the car and after making sure no cars are coming makes a U-turn. He speeds up a little as he goes back the way they came.

Hawkins here they come.

Notes for the Chapter:

Disclaimer - I don't condone what Billy did. This is all a fictional story and the character's actions are not always something I agree with or think is okay. And Don't worry Billy will get into a lot of shit in the next chapter for it. So stay tuned! As well as his and Steve's reunion of sorts. {Also, yes I know this isn't 100% historically accurate.} (It goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway, don't do what Billy did, ever.)

25. "She Is With Another Guy."

Notes for the Chapter:

Another chapter already? What? I guess I'm in the writing mood... Enjoy. :)

It's quarter to midnight when Billy finally pulls up into Hopper's driveway. The lights are on in the small house shining brightly onto the darkened street. Most folks having already turned in for the night. It's no sooner that he's turned off the car when the front door slams open and Hopper comes running out. There's another with him hot on his heels, Billy's first thought is that it must be Joyce but it's clear almost instantly that the person is far from it. His hair is pushed back, his eyes frantic, and his feet bounding heavily behind Hopper's.

It's Steve. Of course it's Steve. It sends a strike of fear through Billy as the implication of them being here since early in the evening talking about who knows what. Talking about the demon dogs, Jane... Or even *him*, and that would be very bad. Billy knows from experience that if the cops get any sort of tip about abuse- Child abuse as it is since he's still seventeen, they have to follow up. Which means talking his dad and then leaving soon after, knowing that there's nothing they can do, or more accurately nothing they will do. Billy will be left with the extra beatings that will put him out of school for another two weeks. Something he can't afford. Not that he cares enough to graduate, but his father does and if he wants to get out of here, which is looking dimmer and dimmer as the days go on, he has to graduate. Steve could ruin everything.

"Where is she?" Hopper says angrily as he approaches Billy.

"Passenger seat, sir." Billy says almost nervously as he steps aside and points to where Jane is sleeping soundly.

"Jane. Jane!" Hopper tries as he shakes her. "Kid? What's wrong with her?"

He asks the questions to Billy who lowers his eyes to the ground. He was hoping he wouldn't have to answer that, but who was he

kidding? Of course he would. Nothing ever goes his way anyway. "She didn't want to come back. I had to give her a little cough syrup to help her sleep."

"What did you say, son?" Hopper's voice is like steel as he turns to Billy who reluctantly meets his eyes.

"I didn't even want to take her. She tried to drive my car, she would have crashed us. She didn't want to come back. I had no choice." Billy tries to reason. "She'll be fine. She'll wake up in a couple of hours."

Billy says the last part from experience as he remembers snippets of when he was younger. His mother trying to drink but not wanting him to see it or get in the way, feeding him some soda with the syrup in it to hide the unnatural sweetness in real sweetness. He would wake up a couple of hours later when his mom was asleep and his father was coming home. He usually pretended to sleep though, not wanting him to decide to push him down the stairs instead of his mother since she wasn't awake to show him that fear and control he liked so much.

Hopper takes an angry step toward him and Billy can't help but flinch away although his feet stay planted to the ground. Steve notices all of this and being the big sappy heart that he is, steps in right then saying, "Jim. You should take Jane inside. I'll get Billy to drive me home."

This seems to snap Hopper out of his anger as he goes to the other side of the car and takes Jane into his arms. He struggles a little under her weight but manages to carry her up the stairs where Steve holds the door open for him. Steve glances back at Billy briefly, an unreadable expression in his eyes before he follows Hopper inside. Billy immediately sags against his car in relief. He pulls out a cigarette and lights it up. He feels angry at this whole situation, but mostly he feels angry at Steve. It's all his damn fault anyway, if it wasn't for him he wouldn't even know this Jane- Not really. He wouldn't have driven off angrily and ran into her if it wasn't for Steve. He would never have gotten into this or any other of the number of shitty situations he's been in if it wasn't for Steve fucking Harrington and his great fucking dick.

“Hey.” Speak of the devil. He walks over to Billy, hands in his jacket.

Billy only glares at him.

Steve lowers his eyes like they’ve been burned and makes Billy feel the tendrils of regret for his cold greeting but he pushes it away as Steve decides not to push him. He ignores the cough syrup for now and instead simply asks, “Can you drive me home?” The thought of Steve and his sad brown eyes walking all the way home is enough for Billy to roll his own and tell him to get in already. They make it a couple of miles before Steve can’t help himself and say something. “I didn’t tell Hopper.”

Billy only lets Steve see him nod his head in reply, but inside an immense relief fills him. He’ll have to deal with his father’s wrath after his little disappearing act today but that’s nothing compared to what will happen if a cop shows up at their door asking questions about hitting and shit like that. Maybe he should give Steve a little less of the cold shoulder, but he can’t. He’s still angry, and his father’s warning from last time is enough for him to not even attempt to cross that line. He has to keep up appearances now which means going out with some bitch that he secretly hates. Take her out and hold the door for her when he really wants nothing more than to share a bed with Steve on a Friday night and hell even watch those stupid movies he likes so much. They haven’t had a night like that in so long it makes Billy’s heart ache and his dick too. It also makes him feel like a bitch himself which brings on a wave of self-loathing he’s trying to ignore. Steve is just a quick fuck, right?

“Billy? Billy?” It’s Steve.

“Yeah, what?” Billy asks as he is pulled away from those dark thoughts.

“We’re here.”

He was right. Billy, on auto pilot had pulled up and put the car in park. Almost like was going to come in with Steve, which he knows he can’t, (but wants to so bad it hurts.)

“Right. See you around, Harrington.”

“But, Billy-“

“Go back to Nancy if you need someone like that. I can never be that. You know that. Hell, everyone knows that.” Billy tells him, hiding the hurt he feels well.

“She is with another guy.” Steve tells him. “And, so am I.”

“Whatever. Just get out of my car.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.” Billy echoes, then adds almost reluctantly, “That’s all it can be. Right now, this is it. Do you get that?”

Steve stares at Billy, something passes between them and an unsaid understanding emerges. This is it. This the end. It has to be, in Billy’s eyes that is but Steve is starting to understand that he can’t keep fighting forever. With Billy? Defiantly. But for him? He doesn’t think he’s that strong. So this is it.

“This is it.” Steve says and Billy smirks with some hurt as to how easy he gave in.

Steve can’t help but smile, almost sadly as Billy pulls him into a death gripping kiss.

This is it.

26. "I Won't Dance 'Til You Hold Me."

Notes for the Chapter:

The nudity is real with this chapter. LOL, but seriously, I hope you enjoy. It picks up right after the last chapter. :)

They kiss frantically and harshly. Both taking out their frustration, anger, and lust on one another. The plan was to go into Steve's empty house and empty bed but they didn't make it there quite yet. The pleasure sparking between them was overwhelming, even more so since they haven't been together like this in so long. In reality it's only been a few weeks, maybe a month, but for them both it feels like forever. They tug and pull at clothing, trying to get where they need that pleasure the most. Both too impatient to wait any longer.

"Fuck." Billy whispers. "I missed this."

"I missed you." Steve responds as he breathes heavily. Billy pauses at the sentiment, a strange look in his eyes before he leans in and brings Steve to his lips. He kisses hard enough to draw blood, but Steve doesn't mind. They end up giving each other messy hand jobs in Billy's car surrounded by the darkness of the night. Steve's house is mostly covered by trees but it's still risky for Billy, something he doesn't truly realize until he's spent and his mind is no longer still under the control of his dick.

They both sit back in their respective seats breathing heavy. Billy tucks his dick back into his pants as Steve does the same, throwing on his shirt too. There's a long pause of silence as Billy smokes his newly lit cigarette. It's not long though before Steve breaks it, not one for those moments of silence. "Is that... 'It'?"

Billy looks over to Steve and considers for a moment then smirks. "Fuck no."

Steve smiles, and like the crazy horny teenagers they are meet in the middle for another bruising kiss, only this time they have the sense to stop and make their way into Steve's house. While round one may

have been quick and messy, round two is where they'll really take their time. They both can agree afterwards that some things are better the second time around sometimes the third too.

"Can I stay the night?" Billy asks as he smokes another cigarette. He's leaning against the bedframe, naked as the day he was born, not bothering to change. Steve sits beside him much the same except without the cigarette.

"Yeah- Yeah, man, of course." Steve says surprised, then less frantic, "You've never stayed the night before."

"Yeah, well, I'm already going to pay hell for leaving like I did for so long. Might as well stay away as long as I can." At Steve's worried face Billy tries to change the subject. "Are you sure it's okay I smoke around you?"

"It's cool. But your dad-"

"Steve. Just- Just don't. This is all we get. Don't let him ruin this too."

It's more vulnerable than Steve's ever seen him before. He can't help but nod in agreement. His hand, out of instinct reaches for his shoulder. Once he realizes what he did he goes to take his hand away before Billy can, but when Billy reaches out it's not to push it away. Instead he takes Steve's hand in his own and holds on tightly. Steve is too shocked to do anything else as they sit there in saddening silence.

"You up for round three? Or are you too tired?" Billy asks suddenly after a few long minutes. His voice has that teasing tone to it and Steve can't help but smirk back to him.

"You sure you can keep up?" Steve quips back.

Billy licks along his lips as he puts the stub of his cigarette in the ash tray on the bed side table that Steve keeps there for him. He grips Steve's hand and in one swift movement is on top of him. This time it's almost too slow, painfully slow. Billy teases and tests Steve as Steve does the same to Billy. First his lips, tongue, neck, then down to Steve's nipples where he's oh so sensitive. Billy takes Steve's dick

in his mouth but just as he is about to come, pulls back and leans up. Steve cries in frustration but Billy only smirks as he lines up Steve's dick with his hole. In one quick movement they're connected once again. It makes Steve cry out in surprise and pleasure as Billy moans.

"Let me ride you." Billy says into Steve's ear as he does just that.

"Yeah, fuck, yeah okay." Steve says and it's settled.

Later, when they're done fucking like the teenagers they are, they gravitate to the kitchen. Both of them are starving, not just from their activities or from the past couple of hours but the long day and evening, now night. If he was to be more accurate Steve would say the morning, nearly two but neither of them fell asleep after each round. Both were tired, yes, unbelievably so, but they both knew that once they fell asleep the morning would come and that would be it. 'This is it' would be in the past. Neither wanted it, but Billy doesn't have a choice and Steve can't make him. Not really.

"Eggs and bacon?" Billy asks with his eyebrow raised as Steve brings the ingredients out and starts cooking.

"Technically it's the morning." Steve says cheekily. "Did you want to put a record on? I don't care which one but I won't dance 'til you hold me."

Billy lets out a small smile and takes a drag of his cigarette. It's cheesy what he said, but it's all Steve and it's nice. It's so fucking nice. But niceties don't last long and soon the small moment of harmony between them disintegrates as a grim expression passes over Steve's face. "Is it your dad? Is that why you don't want to be with me? Or is this just a 'good fuck' for you? 'Cause I don't believe that for a second."

Billy wants to get mad or storm out, but he can't find the energy. "You don't understand what he's like. He'll kill you, Steve. He'll kill me, then he'll move on to Susan and then Maxine. Do you want Maxine to end up with blood on her? To be afraid all the time? Because that's what will happen."

"But me and you-

“That night when he came home and you were at my place, do you remember that?”

“Yeah, you didn’t come to school for a couple of...” Steve trails off as realization dawns on his face. “Billy...”

“Don’t.” Billy says looking down. “Just don’t. I don’t care what you say about Hopper, because I know that’s where you’re going next. He’ll talk himself out of it and I’ll pay for it. I can handle how things are.”

It’s more honest than Billy ever wants to be again. Surprisingly Steve nods his head and says a simple, “Okay.”

Billy wants to believe that’s the end of it, but Steve Harrington is a fucking bleeding heart. And Billy knows better, but he doesn’t say any of this, instead he asks, “Which VHS you want to watch tonight- I mean this morning?”

Steve smiles and the heavy cloud above them passes, if only for a short while.

27. "Please, Don't Leave Me."

They ended up on Steve's couch draped in blankets, even though in mid-May it is fairly warm, and watched an episode of the science fiction show called , 'Doctor Who' that Steve loved more than anything. It was a VHS, expensive to buy but Billy knows that money has never really been a problem for Steve. His dad provides for him in all the necessities of material worth, making him very comfortable indeed. Just as so, Billy also knows that it wasn't entirely Steve's idea to get a full box set of 'Doctor Who' VHS's as Dustin was the one with him on that particular shopping excursion into the city a couple of weeks back. He's the one who introduced him to the show, begging him to buy them, telling Steve that he wouldn't regret it and he didn't. Although Billy would say differently on his feelings on the matter, being forced to watch many of the episodes, caring very little for the special effects and science babble, but it was worth it sometimes to see Steve smile.

It was on the third episode that night that Billy truly fell into absolute boredom and usually he would just leave but this is it for them, for Steve. He doesn't want to ruin it for Steve, and if he's being truly honest, he also doesn't want to ruin it for himself. The warmth and weight of Steve's body next to his is more comforting than he would have liked but it was all he would get, ever. This is it. So he decides to try and sleep, it shouldn't be hard considering that it's nearly four in the morning of a Wednesday night. He wants to stay awake, to cherish every moment as bitch-like as it sounds but he's fucking tired and Steve's here. He sleeps better with Steve beside him he's recently learned, not that he's ever stayed the night before, but an hour or so of a nap after they fuck is always more peaceful than any sleep he's ever really had.

"Billy?" Steve whispers as the credit song plays. Another episode is over, and Billy wants to respond, to guide Steve away from this choice of showing and find another. Maybe some action movie or another, but he's so tired, drifting in-between consciousness and slumber, he's helpless to do anything. Instead he lays with his head on Steve's shoulders falling faster and faster into darkness, but before he can he feels the soft touch of Steve's fingers in his hair and the

bitter sweet words, "Please, don't leave me."

When he wakes up, a few hours later to find it light outside and Steve no longer next to him he feels that blossom of pain in his chest once more. Even when steps approach him and he finds Steve in front of him eating a bowl of cereal the pain does not fade, only increasing as he knows what he has to do. How he has to leave without any real goodbye, without any real hope. He'll hurt Steve, but it will be nothing compared to what his father would do that's for sure. At least this way Steve can have a life, he can't believe he even thinks these things, he's not some self-sacrificing heroic. He just doesn't want anyone to feel the pain he does that comes from his father's fist, and his insistent pursuit of control and power.

"It's nearly eight." Steve says breaking the silence.

Billy nods his head. "Yeah, alright. I gotta go. See you later, Harrington."

"Billy wait-" Steve tries to say but Billy already has his jacket on and his keys ready. He walks quickly out the door and to his car. Steve tries to run after him but Billy has already backed out and is on the main drag. Steve watches him go with a hollow heart, not just for the person he lost but also for the inevitable pain that Billy is to meet when he faces his father once again. The thought of Billy limping and of the bruises Steve always thought were from simple fights filtering in his mind are so jarring that without thought he runs back inside to the phone, forgetting his cereal on the counter.

He picks up the phone with such speed that the papers pinned on the fridge flutter in his wake. He starts ringing the number he knows in the back of his mind. 2-9-3- And then he stops. He hears Billy's voice in the back of his head telling him how Neil will just hurt him more, that cops never help, and how he'll make sure he's sorry if he tries. Steve knows Billy will never hurt him physically, but he'll sure as hell retaliate with other means and the thought of Billy getting even more hurt by his doing is too much to bear, but he would bear it if it would help Billy but it won't. It won't because Billy won't talk, and without him saying anything there isn't much that Hopper can do legally. He knows enough about the screwed up law to know that much.

It leaves a bitter aftertaste in his mouth as he hangs up the phone harshly. He doesn't remove his hand from the phone after just yet, he still hangs on as the flash of anger grows and grows. He feels it bubbling beneath his skin threatening to come loose and rip apart this whole damn world. He's never been so pissed off and angry before in his life, not once. And maybe this is how Billy always feels, trapped in an impossible situation, left to be hurt over and over, and there's nothing that he can do about it. Or so he believes. Or so that's what he was told over and over by the man who has done all this damage.

"Ahhh!" Steve screams in angry frustration as he grips the phone and pulls it off of the wall. It's startling to even him as it crashes on the linoleum of the kitchen floor, shattering into many pieces. The chord having come unhooked dangles against the wall as Steve breathes heavily, his cries of rage turning into hiccuping sobs as the mask of anger removes to show its true face; pain.

He falls to the floor and curls into himself, trying to hold on to something. To himself? To his sanity? Even in his own mind he does not know. But this won't last forever, he will get up and he will continue on, because if there's one thing that Steve Harrington isn't, it's a quitter.

He will fix this, for Billy's sake, even if it kills him.

His mom did always used to teach him that true love is worth all the sacrifice.

28. "I'm Sorry, Can't Make Your Party."

Notes for the Chapter:

This is a little different of a chapter. I use my writing to deal with emotions and things I'm going through, I think all writers do at one point or another. So I really did use this chapter to convey and work through some things. But of course, it's still Billy and Steve, so I hope you like it. <3 And if you have a beloved pet, don't ever take them for granted. They are more precious than anything.

When Steve was about fourteen he had a dog, his name was Rex, not very original but he was only fourteen. Eighteen now, it feels so long ago even if it was just four years. How he's grown up, how he's changed, but how he feels about that dog hasn't. It makes him afraid, not about the dog but about Billy. While a dog and a human being are vastly different, the way he feels about those he loves isn't. Steve's afraid for how he feels about Billy, because even if after all these years he still feels the way he does about Rex, will he still feel the same about Billy in another four years?

Rex came to Steve on a summer's day when the grass was long and the skies were blue with impossible, big fluffy clouds. Billy came to him on a similar day but it was in September, it still felt like summer then though. Rex on the other hand, Steve knew instantly that he was going to love this dog that this dog belonged with him. Whether they both lost mother's or have shitty father's, there was something there, deep that connected them. He immediately took him home from the side of the road where he found him. He was on his bike at the time but he walked with the dog the rest of the many miles home. When he got there he fed him and the dog slept in his bed that night. For once, Steve didn't feel so alone. Billy did that for him too, with Billy he wasn't alone. He was connected. Connections are such wonderful things, especially to others, but others can get hurt and with that connection between each other, so can you.

For the next year Steve took the utmost care of Rex, who was part Border collie, and there by in his nature to be loyal. Every day after

school Steve would take him for a walk, he gave him food off his plate, and slept in his bed. Steve had friends of course, Tommy was one but he was never really a friend. Not like Rex. The next summer Rex didn't want to go for his walks anymore, which confused Steve, but at that age girls were becoming more apparent and he was distracted. Boys too he started to learn and that was even more distracting as his confusion and teenage angst grew, but he still loved Rex. It didn't really occur to him until Rex stopped eating that something was really wrong. He thought it best to take him to a veterinarian and so he did. For, just like Billy, he wanted to help, to make those he loves better. Not just because he has that connection with them but because he has always had that intense pull underneath everything to do the right thing. To care immensely.

It turns out that things don't always work out. Steve already knew this when his mother left, but even though he loved her, it was not even close to the connection he shared with Rex. When Rex died, Steve cried for three days. He never knew he could cry so much or so often. It was then that the knife on the counter became a comforting thought, but an evil one too. Billy's not dead, but he's, in his own mind, severed the connection between them and that hurts too. Steve doesn't sob about it because Billy is still alive and there's still hope. There's still a chance, and that is everything, but he does let a few tears slip when he goes home to an empty bed. Or when he passes Billy in the hallway and he slips his eyes by like Steve is nothing. Everything hurts those days and Steve can't help but think of Rex, how if he was here that maybe Steve could handle this. Handle being without Billy, but Rex isn't here and he can't. He's so alone, and yeah he has the kids, and Nancy and Jonathan but the connection is something that rarely if ever comes. Steve's afraid also, that it never will again, and maybe he can't handle another. Maybe that knife is just too comforting right now.

"Hey, Steve!" It's Jenny from Trig. She's over peppy and way too nice to Steve but after talking to Nancy he figured out why, she has a crush on him. Steve was surprised but Nancy wasn't because Steve's always been a little clueless. In an adorable way of course.

"Hey, Jen." Steve says stopping in the hallway as she approaches. "What's up?"

“Well, you know how everyone is going to be having parties in June and the summer to wrap up the year? Well I thought it would be great to have one in May, sort of an early- early party to start all the parties.” She laughs at her own words and how she phrases them, almost self-consciously.

Steve’s first instinct is to say no. He’s not really in the mood to party, not after he broke his phone a couple of days ago. It just wouldn’t be fun, but then Steve thinks better of the situation. Maybe a party is what he needs after all? A little booze, a little music, and a whole lot of distraction. It sounds kind of perfect right now. Especially when he was planning to go home on this Friday to an empty house, order himself some pizza and have a few beers all alone. It’s just depressing to even think about now. A party would be good for him, so he smiles and says, “Yeah that sounds great.”

She smiles almost too happy at his answer and says, “Awesome! So rad, um this is great. Everyone’s already said they’re going to come. I think we all need a break from studying. Oh, and don’t worry it’s all seniors. Even Billy said he was coming.” She laughs. “Which is great, he’s kind of the party King now. Not that you aren’t still, of course! You both are kings.”

She laughs nervously but Steve can’t return any sort of pleasantry as his heart falls into his chest. That pizza and beers alone seems all the more appealing now. Not in the least depressing. “I’m sorry,” He says, breaking her from her laughter as she looks to him curiously and a little hurt, “Can’t make your party.”

“Wait-” She tries to say, but Steve is already down the hallway and making his way to his car. There’s only one period left anyway. It’s Friday, why not blow it off?

Connections hurt, Steve ponders on as he starts his car, especially when they’re severed by either death or not even severed at all. Where they’re still there but one or the other tries to ignore it, pretend it’s not there. He backs out of the parking lot, driving towards his house as he thinks about how to forget. How Billy forgets. Forgets when the other can never do so. When the other, him in this case, has a bleeding heart. Who loves and cares with everything he’s got. Connections are such strong things that are

always taken for granted. And isn't that the most heart breaking you've ever heard? Steve knows that it is for him, he's lived it after all.

Pizza and beers, right now, sounds really good. Maybe he'll even watch an action movie. Maybe he'll have eggs and bacon for breakfast tomorrow.

Hope is still alive, and where there's hope, anything's possible. Steve knows that too.

He pulls into his driveway and smiles.

Notes for the Chapter:

Also I know we've had a lot of Steve's perspective, but in the next chapter we'll hopefully have a little more from Billy's. :3

29. "I'm Afraid I'd Kill Your Lover While Your Back Was Turned."

Notes for the Chapter:

In this chapter we get a deeper insight into Billy's life, more specifically his childhood and how that has affected him now. How that has influenced him in all the decisions he's made, more notably the ones concerning Steve.

"Mom?"

"Mom! I'll be home soon! Okay, bye!" Greg hangs up the landline of Jenny's at her house after making arrangements with his mom for later. Billy watches him do it after coming downstairs from using the bathroom, too much beer. It's not enough for him to be drunk, only slightly buzzed but then again he doesn't want to get drunk. He can't, not when his father is expecting him back at half past one in the morning at the latest. Billy being almost eighteen (next week being his birthday) his father is a little more lenient if that's even possible, telling him to enjoy his last moments of freedom as according to him he'll be going to college and getting a good job. Something Neil could never accomplish, having to settle for working at an insurance firm making only enough to pay the bills and a few things here and there. He always wanted to do better, Billy is sure, whatever better means in his warped head, and either way Billy knows he won't be following his father's orders. One way or another he won't be obeying his wishes much longer.

"Hey, Hargrove, the keg still running strong?" Greg asks as he places the phone in the receiver and turns to Billy with a genuine smile.

Billy smiles too, but it's not a real one, it's more of a grimace than anything. "Course. Can't have a party without a keg."

"Right-o daddy-o."

Billy gives Greg a queer look. "Really? You trying to sound like fag on purpose?"

The easy going smile on Greg's face drops quickly. "Right. You and your fags..." He shakes his head then says under his breath, "If I didn't know any better I would say you were one."

And wasn't that the worst thing he could have said right then. No sooner are the words out of his mouth before he's slammed into the kitchen wall, Billy's face red with fury inches from Greg's. Billy's mouth is in a snarl and his eyes are blazing. His hands like claws around Greg's shirt, choking him as he holds him up against the wall. Greg's feet are tiptoeing on the ceramic floor as he gasps for breath. Billy gets closer if that's possible and whispers dangerously, "What was that MacDonald?"

"Mom?" His voice starts to sound panicked now as he walks closer to the bed where she lays on her side, her eyes looking to the window, away from his view. Her arm is over her head and the other disappears under a blanket. Her dirty blonde hair, so much like his own is tangled and stretched all over the pillow. Billy reaches out his small fingers to her arm, shaking her as he asks again, "Mom?"

"Man, get off me!" Greg shouts as he gains the upper hand and pushes Billy away. He knows he won't have the upper hand forever and quickly rushes out of the house to the backyard where the party is, and all the people too. Witnesses in fact, the safest place when an angry, pissed off Billy Hargrove has it in for you. That's for sure.

"Fucking pussy." Billy says as he watches the kid run away. He doesn't even chase after him, figuring he's not worth it. Instead he makes his way to the fridge and looks for a beer that's actually cold and not overly warm from the surprisingly warm May night. Usually it's a little cooler this time of the year, or so he was told by Alice when she was talking off his ear on the way here. Man, he hates that girl.

"Billy, there you are!" Speak of the devil.

"What do you want?"

She pouts. "Don't be like that, Billy. Anyway, I have to get home. It's my curfew."

“Seriously?” Billy asks before taking a large chug of his beer.

“I already told you this, remember? Anyway, I know, okay? My mom is such a square.”

He touches her shoulder and with surprising strength for his small size rolls her onto her back. Her lifeless eyes stare back at him. Her mouth is open slightly. Billy is just a kid and doesn't think about things like death often but if someone were to ask him he would have said that he thought when people died, that they died with their mouths closed and their eyes shut tightly. Almost like they were going to sleep. That's what his mom used to say, that death is like going to sleep when he would ask not that he asked often. He only did when his grandmother died a few months ago. But his mom was wrong or maybe she was lying because death is not going to sleep. All of the proof of that is right here.

“Mom?” Billy's lip trembles.

The beer that's half way to Billy's mouth stops there. His eyes a little clouded become clear when Alice puts her hand on his arm, still chatting away. Billy stopped listening somewhere in the middle of it all, she's so boring to him. At least Steve always engaged him, interested him, whatever. He needs to stop thinking about him, he needs to focus now, on his reality now. His truth.

“Come on, I'll drive you back.” Billy says, interrupting Alice's rambling.

“Super!” She smiles widely and they head out to his Camaro, Billy chugging down the rest of his beer and throwing it on the grassy backyard as they do so. No one really notices this or them leaving, too wrapped up or more likely, too drunk to care.

“Mommy?”

“Marianne! Marianne!” It's his father's voice, not quite yelling, more calling out than anything. His father never did get too 'emotional'. His fists held all the emotion he needed to release, to spit onto others.

“Dad?” Billy says looking up to his father who seems in a state of shock as he stares at his dead wife's body.

"Billy, go to your room." His voice is as cold as stone.

"Daddy-"

That's all his father needs before he's grabbing him by the shirt and dragging him down the hallway to exactly where he wants him to be. He pushes him in and when Billy tries to stand back up, Neil backhands him hard enough to leave bruises for days. It's the first time that he's ever done that, and Billy's surprised. Shocked, even. He saw him doing this to his mom but he would have never thought that it would happen to him. Or maybe he did think, or know somewhere in the back of his mind that he would.

Maybe he always knew.

The first time he remembers his dad hitting his mom she had said something to him. "I'm afraid I'd kill your lover while your back was turned. That's how much I hate her- how much I hate you." He hit her after that, and said something like it was a mistake and that he's already asked God for forgiveness. That she has to forgive and obey him. Now, here in his room he tells Billy that he has to obey him now. Just as his mother did. His belt is then removed, it clicks undone and is taken out of the loops. Billy is confused and scared. But he obeys. His mother did so he should. Didn't she?

"Alright, see you B." Alice says running out of the car and up to her house.

"Yeah," Billy says to empty air as he lights up another cigarette and takes a puff. It's probably good that he dropped her off now, he has to get home soon anyway. His father told him to get home early and he will obey for now. What else can he do? With that thought he puts the lighter away and backs out of the driveway. Saying to Alice, even though she's already out of sight and in the house, "See you around."

30. "So This Is Where You Wanted To Be, And It's A Goddamn Shame That You're Not Here With Me."

"Steve?" Billy asks, breaking the silence between them and the night.

"Yeah?" Steve asks, swallowing nervously. Billy's never asked him anything, never stopped to talk or make any effort with him after. Usually they fuck and sometimes have a round two or three but then he leaves. Leaves just as suddenly as he came and Steve never fails to believe that maybe it was all a dream, because how could it be real? How could Billy Hargrove keep coming back to him? Big, flaming homosexual Billy? Doesn't really make sense, does it?

"I'm sorry."

"What?" He wasn't expecting that.

"You heard me." He says a little harshly, but then stops and takes a breath. His next words are just a little quieter, softer. "For using your face as a punching bag. You didn't deserve that shit."

Steve is so shocked by the apology, by the words of remorse and regret that he can't find any words of his own to respond at first. He lays there, staring at the ceiling and taking in the words Billy uttered. He wants to say, 'it's okay' or that he 'accepts it' but neither seems right. Neither seems enough to say how much what Billy's shown him means to him. He's not talking about the sex or whatever, but the fact that Billy showed him another side of himself. Showed him that Billy is someone he's been wanting. It doesn't really make sense when he thinks about it. It would be impossible to put into words, let alone the right ones when he can't even form them in his mind. It takes so long for Steve to wrap his head around the apology and what it means, what to say to it that Billy is already getting up and trying to get away.

"Hey, wait." Steve says anxiously as he too rises up from his bed and tries to get closer to Billy who is hurriedly putting on his underwear.

"I gotta get back before Neil-" Billy tries to say, and is it just Steve or does he sound less like himself? Dare he think, vulnerable?

"You said it yourself, he won't be back for hours."

Billy pauses as Steve's hand makes its way onto his arm. It's a soft touch, barely there, but it burns like nothing he's ever known. His heart hurts, like a bird is there instead of the flesh, beating and pecking all around the cage of bone, skin, and blood. Like it's trying to get free. As though it is trapped and it hurts its host so it knows it too. Knows that they are both trapped, but maybe it's not a bad thing.

"Billy..." Steve whispers, unable to say it loudly. The moment seems too fragile to speak louder than necessary. He puts his other hand lower on Billy's hip and his lips make their way onto his chest. Kissing softly where that bird beats its wings and he says, "I know you are."

It takes Billy a moment in his frazzled state to realize that Steve is responding to his apology only minutes ago. It feels more like hours, this moment stretching on for infinity. Steve's lips are warm and make both his cock hard and his heart hurt more in such a good way. In such a passionate, 'I need you' kind of way. Billy can't help but interlock his fingers into Steve's hair as Steve continues his movements. His lips traveling from Billy's chest, to his neck, leaving soft kisses. It feels like the whispers of secrets that he's never known and hasn't realized he's craved until now.

"Steve..." Billy can't help but gasp as Steve's lips meet his, enveloping them in comfort and heat.

Steve pulls away after a few minutes and meets Billy's eyes. There's something so tender, so honest and raw that leaves Billy free falling. It's like he's falling off a bridge into some unknown land. It's scary, down right terrifying but there's this thrill and there's someone right beside him. Beside him jumping too and it's Steve. Steve and his bleeding heart and his big brown eyes. He smiles at him and Billy smiles too.

"Come here." Billy says gently as he brings Steve closer, and then they interlock their lips once again. They untangle and re-tangle themselves back to their liking. Billy is on top of Steve who lays on the bed accepting all of Billy's heated kisses and touch. It feels different this time though, it feels almost real.

"Billy." Steve says as Billy nibbles on the side of his neck. "Billy. Billy.

Billy."

"Billy." Steve opens his eyes with the name still lingering on his lips. The sun is bright and horrible in his eyes. His blinds are wide open and it's a large contrast from the night he was dreaming of. Of the darkness that surrounded him and Billy. It leaves Steve gasping inside, unable to determine what reality is and what a dream is. This feels real, this is real, but when he reaches out his hand to the other side of his bed, it's cold and it's empty. Billy is not here, he never was. No- That's not right he was but it was so long ago. So long since they shared good words, shared any kind of touch.

Billy isn't here.

It's that thought, that realization that brings the tears to Steve's eyes. He rolls over into the pillow that was Billy's and lets the tears fall as he cries. The reality that they're over, that Billy isn't here. That he said he doesn't want to be is happening all over again. It makes the pain more real, more intense. It's like it's happening all over again. He lets out a sob that racks his whole body. Billy isn't here, he's probably off somewhere with Alice or some other girl. Playing it normal, like Steve was nothing. Steve knows that's not how he feels and he will fight for him to be happy even if it's not with him. He's already decided that, but Billy walking away from him. For whatever reason, it still hurts. And right now after that dream, that dream that was so real... The pain becomes even more so.

He thinks about him and Alice, together, of Billy unhappy and he can't help but say around the tears, "So this is where you wanted to be, and it's a goddamn shame that you're not here with me." Because it is. It really is. They could be here, waking up together. Having fucking breakfast in bed. Happy. They could have it all, they could have all that love the musicians talk about, but Billy walked away. Steve knows he has his reasons but why does it have to hurt so fucking much?

Why does he have to feel this way?

31. "I See Pictures Now Of The Two Of You And It Makes Me Sick."

"Hey, Rob." Steve says in way of greeting as he walks into the mostly empty classroom. It's an hour before school starts and the yearbook club usually meets in Mr. Dalen's classroom at this time to work on it. More so lately since it's getting to the end of the year and they need to send in the pictures and spreads to be published before the fifth of June in a week. Steve knows all this because of Jonathan who, a natural photographer is part of the club putting together the yearbook.

"Hey Steve!" Rob says cheerfully. He's never had a bad word to say about anybody. Always a well-liked guy around the school and not just because of his attitude but by the fact that he always asks others if they're okay with certain photos being used in the yearbook, something the previous yearbook club's haven't exactly done. It caused quite a commotion last year and general dislike for the club but because of Rob it's been turning around. Something that Jonathan was proud to tell both him and Nancy. His mom too since they were at the Byers when that particular conversation came up. "Looking for Jonathan?"

"Yeah, man, where is he?"

"Ah, you didn't hear, he's sick."

"Oh, crap." Steve says disappointed. He was hoping to talk to him and Nancy too as she usually comes early with Jonathan and uses the time to study. He really wanted to talk to them both and ask for their advice. He's not really sure what he should do about Billy, how he can help him in his situation. How to deal with his dad, it's a bigger issue than Steve thinks he's capable of doing alone. He's eighteen, he's never had to deal with any of this kind of shit before. Not to mention how scared he is for Billy. He doesn't know how bad it can get but by how fearful Billy seems of his father, it must be pretty bad. Which leaves Steve not only scared but worried and stressed too.

"Sorry, dude." Rob says genuinely apologetic as he rearranges photos

on one of the desks.

“It’s cool, man, not your fault. Is it okay if I hang out here until class? I’ll just study or something.”

Rob smiles happily. “Sure. Katie ditched me too for her boyfriend so it’s just me as you probably noticed.”

“That sucks.” Steve says as he takes a seat in an empty desk, pulling his books out of his bag.

“Yeah, no kidding. I have to decide which couple to feature on page six. I mean, I’m pretty sure Mr. Allen won’t care about some kids making out but Mrs. Sherry is kind of old school so I’m not sure which one to use.”

“Well maybe I can help.” Steve says, not wanting to start studying anyway.

“Alright, thanks. I’m stuck between these three. Don’t tell Jonathan but he and Nancy are the second.” Rob explains cheekily.

“I won’t.”

Steve takes the photos from Rob and looks at them closely. The first is of Dean and Sandra a couple that is shooing to win prom Queen and King. They’ve been together since ninth grade, nicknamed Romeo and Juliet for how they were ‘so in love’ and yet at the same time ‘tragically’ kept breaking up every other week. It was all the gossip when they were in the ninth and tenth grades, but by eleventh they settled down and haven’t broken up since.

The next photo is Nancy and Jonathan at the spring formal. They stare at each other with such fondness and love that it makes Steve’s heart ache. Not because he’s hurt that they’re together, no he got over that a while ago, but because of the fact that they’re happy. That they can be together without any consequence. That they can openly share their love, whereas Steve will never be able to do that. Neither him nor Billy. He quickly puts that photo to the back of the pile and the third final one is revealed.

It’s Billy and Alice. They’re in the hallway by a locker and they are

doing exactly what Rob said, making out. It sends Steve's heart through his stomach. He feels that familiar burn of pain, of tears behind his eyes. He puts the photos down quickly and starts to pack up his bag. Rob looks at him curiously then says, "I take it Billy and Alice are a no?"

"Yeah." Steve says almost roughly as a lump starts to form in his throat. "You're right, Mrs. Sherry will hate it."

Steve is already half way out the door when Rob calls out after him a little confused at his abrupt departure, "Thanks?"

Steve hangs out in the library instead of staying in the empty classroom with Rob. He waits until the first bell rings impatiently. He wants more than anything for this day to be over already. The dream he had that morning or last night, however it's put, it was awful. It left him hollowed out and raw. He doesn't want to be around people, around Billy and Alice. He should have just stayed home but he wanted to talk to Jonathan and Nancy, and damn, look how well that went, huh?

He makes his way quickly to his first class, dodging left and right all of the other students in the hall making their way to their own classes. It's not an easy feat but after three years in this place it's more readily accomplished, or it should have been until he sees Billy and Alice making out in front of a locker. His lips, his arms, his touch, on her. It makes him feel sick, dirty, and really fucking angry. A year ago he would have just walked away, but it's not a year ago, is it?

"What the fuck?" Billy yells as Steve grabs him away from Alice and throws him, with all the pain he's got into the lockers. Once Billy's back on his feet, anger in his eyes and fists ready to do some real damage he sees Steve standing there. His features soften for half a second as he asks in surprise, "Steve?"

Surprise? Fuck him. Steve grabs him and throws him against the locker. He leans in close, and with jealousy, pain, and anger making his heart beat says, quietly so that no one else will hear because they're not a loud to show how they feel, "I see pictures now of the two of you and it makes me sick."

“Walk away, Harrington.” Billy says coolly, his face like stone and his voice like ice.

Steve takes a moment to stare at him before saying, “Never.”

That one word is more than this moment, more than what it means right now. That word is a promise and a vow all rolled into one, and even though Billy has said that Steve is nothing, that he can't do this, he smiles. It's half a smirk but it's enough for Steve, he can live on that smile for a little longer. That smile says, 'I know.' That smile says, 'Neither am I.' But Billy can't let this go, Steve attacking him in the hallway with everyone around that is. With Steve egging him on. He just can't and Steve knows this too, but he doesn't care, he would take every punch Billy dishes out if it means he gets to see that smile. If he gets to know that this isn't over, even if it seems like it is right now.

Billy punches him across the jaw and Steve pulls him down with him as he falls to the ground. There's a few hits from one another without much vigor put into it before the teachers finally arrive. They run towards the two, pushing through the crowd. Both teenagers know they're coming soon as they hear them yelling over the noise of the crowd, but before they do, Billy whispers something into Steve's ear. Something that makes Steve paralyzed.

“Alright! Alright!” Mr. Dalen yells over the noise. “Break it up everyone! Break it up! I said break it up!”

Notes for the Chapter:

Well!? What did Billy say!? :)

32. "Damn, I Love You."

"Damn, I love you." Billy whispers it breathlessly before Steve is pulled off of him by Mr. Dalen. His stomach is throbbing and his face feels like it's on fire, but it's nothing like the way his heart now beats. He's stuck in-between some kind of shock and wonderment as he stares at Billy who declines the help from Mrs. Sherry and gets up on his own. He wants to stay by Billy's side, to feel what he just said, to know and get some other kind of conformation that those words are true but he's being pulled away. Mr. Dalen is dragging him and Billy is being dragged by Mrs. Sherry who takes him to the other end of the school which makes sense, he supposes. They wouldn't want them in the same vicinity after that supposed fight.

"Alright, now you stay right there Mr. Harrington." Mr. Dalen says sternly. "I'm going in to speak to Mr. Allen and when I get back you'll be sitting right here. You don't want to make this any worse than it already is, son."

Steve hardly has any response, only nodding his head still in that same paralyzed shock from the words that were uttered into his ear. He hardly notices the teacher going into the principal's office or the secretary Ms. Shear giving him the stink eye. All he can focus on is what Billy said, 'Damn, I love you.' I love you? I love you. Damn, I love you. He said it like he was just realizing it, or maybe he was just overcome with the emotion? Which doesn't sound right when you're talking about Billy Hargrove but on the other hand he says what he means. He may be evasive but when he says something, he means it. No matter how screwed up it is. Or how surprising.

"Steve!" It's Mr. Dalen, back already. He has the door half open and Steve can see Mr. Allen sitting in his desk waiting.

"Right." Steve says to him as he gets up and walks into the office. The door is shut behind him and Mr. Allen stares at him with that same unfazed stern expression. Nothing ever shocks him, even though he's only somewhere in his late thirties it's already like he's been the principal for the last hundreds of years when in reality it's only been ten.

“Steve.” Mr. Allen starts out by saying. “I hear you got into a fight this morning.”

“Yes, sir.” Steve says. Why deny the truth? There’s probably a hundred witnesses and by the end of this little meeting everybody will already know about it. There’s probably at least fifty rumours on why the fight started and some stupid reason as to why it ended.

“Now, look Steve, with everything that’s happened I understand why you’re angry. Why you think that a fight is the best thing for you. What with your mom, I know it hasn’t been a great year for you. And I’ve heard the rumors, I know about Nancy and Jonathan. Although you all seem very chummy now.”

“Mr. Allen look I-”

“Stop, stop. Just listen. This close to graduation is no time to be getting into fights. Taking into account your mom, I will give you only a three day suspension and I won’t put it onto your permanent record. You’ve always been a bright kid, Steve but your grades have been slipping. I don’t know what’s going on but you need to get your act together. Preferably before the final examinations in a couple of weeks.” Mr. Allen explains, his mentioning of Steve’s mom making Steve momentarily forget about Billy. “You may go. But I will have to call your father.”

“Thanks.” Steve says as he gets up and walks out of the principal’s office.

He didn’t think about that, about how Mr. Allen will be calling his father. He knows his father though, knows that he won’t be horrible about it. He probably will forget about it and he’ll never even get any shit for it, but Billy... If- No when Mr. Allen calls Billy’s father, there’s going to be consequences. Billy’s going to get hurt again. His skin marred with more bruises, him limping, and maybe even holding his arm. The thought of him all battered, broken, and bruised it makes Steve’s heart hurt. He has to do something, he has to.

“Hey, Steve-o, heard about the fight, man.” It’s Greg and he seems genuinely happy about the whole ordeal. He’s the only one other than Steve in the hallway at the moment as everyone else is in their

first class. "Nice."

"Yeah, thanks, man." Steve says distracted as he looks around, wondering where Billy could have went. "Hey, look have you seen Billy?"

"You looking for round two, huh?" Greg laughs. "Yeah he's out back having a smoke."

"Thanks, see you around."

"Yeah, no problem. See you!"

Steve walks quickly down the hallway toward the back door and to where Billy usually has his smoke break, especially when he wants to be away from everyone. It's where some of the teachers go on their breaks but seeing as everyone is in class it's unlikely that any teachers would be there now, or anyone for that matter which is perfect. He needs to talk to Billy, to try and help. He's not even sure what he can do or what he should say, all he knows is that he has to do something. He can't bear the thought of Billy getting hurt again, no less because of him.

"I was wondering when you'd try and find me." Billy says as he takes a long puff of his cigarette.

"Yeah." Steve says a little awkwardly. "Wait were you waiting for me?"

"Steve- Steve- Steve. You're a fucking bleeding heart." He says it like it explains everything but for Steve it doesn't. He's more confused than ever.

"I don't understand, Hargrove, you said-"

"I know what I said."

Steve takes a step back at Billy's abrupt and angry voice. He's looking at Steve with daggers but it only lasts a few seconds before they fade. He looks to the ground and says, "You know what's going to happen when I go home. Which is what I'm supposed to do. One week suspension."

“One week? I only got three days and I started the thing.”

“Well, you’re Mr. Golden Boy, aren’t you?” Billy says with a bitter smile. “Look, Harrington, why don’t we go for a ride.”

“What?” Steve asks, surprised.

“A ride. Unless you want me to go home now and get the shit beat out of me. It’s his day off.”

“No, no fuck no. Billy you can’t go back there. He’ll kill you.”

“Yeah, maybe one day. Not today though, if you go for a ride with me.” Billy says and it’s kind of fucking manipulative but Steve is a fucking bleeding heart who’s maybe possibly in love, so he responds with a nod of his head, and then they’re walking away from the school. Steve gets into Billy’s car and Billy starts the engine.

“You said you love me.” Steve says almost gently, like he’s afraid of making Billy angry, or scaring him.

“Yeah.” Billy confirms as he backs out of the school parking lot and makes his way onto the road to a place only they know. “I did. Does that make me some kind of girl?”

Steve smirks and says teasingly, “What do you mean, you were always some kind of girl.”

“Fuck you.” Billy says as he cracks a real genuine smile.

“You first.”

33. "Here's To You, You Miserable Fuck."

"So are we going to talk or did you have other plans in mind?" Steve says in an attempt at casual but it's anything but. This whole situation is abnormal in every sense of the word. They're in a situation that's familiar but at the same time Steve knows it's not. He feels like the rug has been pulled out from under his feet. He feels as though he on unsteady ground with Billy. He knows what to expect from an angry Billy, a horny Billy, and hell even an upset Billy, but calm? Not talking? No witty words or remarks? Only the calmness of the forest that surrounds them in their usual spot? He's not sure how to deal with that or what to do. Not to mention all the shit they have to figure out and more importantly what Billy said.

"You have a dirty mind, Harrington." Billy says in return but there's no bite to it, no accompanying smirk like there usually is.

"Billy-

"I know what you want me to fucking say but I can't. Fuck, I don't even know why I said it in the hallway." He looks apologetic as he crosses over the word 'hallway', looking at Steve's no doubt bruised to hell face a little longer than necessary. Sure, Billy has a couple of his own but they're nothing like Steve's. Billy's always been the stronger fighter of the two when it comes to simply fists and he tried to be gentle. As gentle as one can be in a supposed fight that had to look real. To keep his reputation intact. To not cast any suspicion on him and Steve, and what they share. Or shared, or, fuck, what even are they now? What were they ever?

"Billy, I l-

"Don't. Just, fucking don't Steve."

Steve feels his heart squeeze painfully at the rejecting word as he lowers his head and makes no attempt to say anything more on the matter. Why should he? Besides, what was he really expecting? For them to run off into the sunset together? For Billy to suddenly change his mind completely and say, 'fuck yes'? He knows that would never happen. He's heard people say that love clouds the mind as much as

your dick but Billy's got a hold on both for him, how is he supposed to know if he's even doing the right thing? Maybe Billy's sway over him is stronger than he thought which sounds stupid when he thinks about it, but really, if it were anyone else getting the shit beat out of them by their father Hopper would already know. Steve would have already gone to him and told the fucking truth. But not with Billy, not with him. He's so fucked.

"What's wrong with you?" Billy asks as Steve puts his head in his hands, his face clearly showing signs of distress as he makes the realization of what he's done, of how he's handled things.

"I'm an idiot." Steve says almost too quietly for Billy to hear but he does hear.

"You always knew that." It's supposed to come out in a teasing tone but instead it falls flat and the smirk that Billy tries to muster comes out as more of a grimace than anything.

"No I- I should have told Hopper about your dad. If it were anyone else I would have. You're getting hurt, Billy, your life is practically in danger every time you walk through that door."

As soon as Steve says the words 'Hopper' and 'your dad' he freezes with fear. His features become panicked as the understanding of what Steve says sinks into him. He's saying that he should have told the chief of police about his father, that he should have done it when he first found out. Which indicates that he's going to do and soon. He's going to tell him and Hopper is going to come to his house. He's going to tell his dad and talk to him. He's going to have to lie and his father will beat him so bloody he won't be able to walk for a week, maybe more. Last time his leg was broken in three places and he lost two teeth, molars thank God for some favours, but still. This time, it will be so much worse.

"No." Billy says as he drops his cigarette out his door window that's wide open and turns to Steve. He grabs him by the shirt and grips it tightly. "You can't fucking say shit."

"Get off me!" Steve says as he pushes him away and Billy is so shaken up by the threat of his father knowing that he allows Steve to worm

his way out of his grip. Steve, once free, opens the door and gets out quickly, but Billy's not done with him. He follows him out of the car and into the small opening in the forest that they've called their own for over six months.

"You fucking promised, asshole."

"Oh! Oh, I'm the asshole now! Billy, I'm trying to help you." His voice is more desperate than Billy's ever heard it and he wishes more than anything that he could believe what Steve says. That he's right. That he could just go to the police and they would do something. That they would make this endless terror and pain end, but they can't. When it comes to shit like this, they're useless and him- he has to pay the price. He has to deal with the aftermath, with all the shit that rains down because of it. Why can't Steve get that? Why can't he understand that life- real fucking life is not easy? Not ever. And that people like him- they don't get help, they only ever get more pain. He would think that Steve of all people would get that, but no. He doesn't and he never will. Not ever.

"You think your helping me, but all you're doing is screwing me over! And if he kills me as you keep fucking saying- It will be your fault, Steve! Your fault." Billy yells at him heatedly.

"No, no." Steve says, shaking his head as he paces around in front of him.

"It's true and you fucking know it."

"Fuck you." Steve says in response. "Hopper will help you. I trust him."

"Yeah, well I don't." Billy tells him. "You're the only one I trust in this whole shitty fucking world."

"Then trust me now, Billy. Trust that I know what I'm doing." Steve is in his space now, his hand on his arm and it's so tempting to agree. To do whatever Steve says and know that it will be okay, to accept his comforting words and touches, but he knows it won't. It can't.

Billy shakes his head no and turns away from the other teenager. "I

can't."

Steve nods his head as angry and hurt tears fill his eyes. He can't deal with Billy's stupidity. His inability to get out of his father's fist. He can't deal with seeing Billy hurt again. He just can't. So what is there to do in a time like this? Go to the car and reach under the seat for the spare whisky bottle that Billy leaves there? Take a large sip and hand to Billy who does the same? Why not?

"I'm sorry." Billy says and it's the second time he's ever said that to Steve. It hurts to hear.

"Yeah." Steve holds up the bottle and before taking another swig says, "Here's to you, you miserable fuck."

34. "Drink Up, So We Can Both Finally Die."

"What's the matter, Billy?" Steve says bitterly as he holds out the bottle to him. "Hurry up, drink up, so we can both finally die."

"No one's going to die, Steve, as long as you don't tell the fucking chief of police." Billy tells him with just as much anger and stubbornness as Steve has for him now. Even so, he takes the bottle and has another long sip. He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and sits back on his Camaro. He stares up at the sky as Steve mirrors his movements. Both are silent for now, unsure of how to get past this brick wall that has been built between them. But as per usual after a few minutes of silence and more drinking (mostly from Billy), it's Steve who speaks first.

"Okay." He relents "I won't tell Hopper."

"Good." Billy says as he gets up, ready to get out of here as soon as possible.

"No, wait. I won't tell him as long as you get out of there."

"What are you talking about?"

"Move out." Steve says bluntly. "Get away from him and then I know that you're safe. That's all I want."

Billy laughs, but it's more hurtful to Steve than anything. "You really are an idiot Harrington. Where the hell would I go, huh? And what about Maxine?"

He doesn't mention Susan, something that Steve catches onto but doesn't mention as he answers with, "You can stay with me. My dad won't care- or notice and you still have that job at the garage, right?"

"Yeah... But you can't just-"

"No, look, just move in with me. You'll- we'll graduate in less than a month, then we can get out of here. Into the city or something. Just you and me."

“You’re crazy.” Billy says, all the cockiness drained from him in mere seconds as he leans heavily onto his car. The words Steve is saying hitting him full force.

“Come on, Billy, this is your chance to get away from him. Please, I can’t- You can’t go back there.” Steve pleads.

“Steve, I can’t. He’ll hurt Maxine, do you want that on your conscious? ‘Cause I don’t.”

“Didn’t know you had one.” At Billy’s glare Steve quickly retracts. “Sorry, not a time to be joking.”

“You must be joking if you think me living with you is going to happen.” Billy sees Steve’s hurt features and quickly clarifies why not. “I can’t just leave her to him.”

“Then we’ll just find a way to film it or something, fuck I don’t know.”

“I’m eighteen, Steve, it’s not some parent hitting their kid. It’s just a fight that I could have walked away from.” Billy says it quietly as Steve runs his fingers through his hair frustrated.

“Wait, what?” Steve asks as he looks up, surprised.

“My birthday was last week. Anyway, it doesn’t fucking matter. None of this does because there’s nothing we can do. There’s nothing I can do.”

He looks down dejected and Steve can’t help but feel a little guilty for bringing this whole thing up. He also feels bad, fucking terrible to be more accurate. He just wants to help and make sure that Billy isn’t getting hurt anymore, but this shit is difficult. He thought Billy was exaggerating but fuck. Even if he is eighteen, Hopper can still do something though, right? He has to. They can’t just leave Max in that house with him if that’s how he’s like. They just can’t.

“Then come live with me and if something happens with Max she’ll tell the other kids and they’ll tell me or Hopper. Or Susan and they’ll get out of there.”

Billy smiles bitterly. "You really want to take the chance of her getting hurt?"

"No. No, fuck, no of course not. I don't know man, I'm just thinking out loud here. You could try to help you know. Or maybe we could just tell Hopper and he'll know what to do." Steve tries again even though he knows it's probably fruitless to even attempt again.

"I told you no. He'll kill me, Steve." Billy tells him sternly.

"Then we'll make sure that he can't." Steve's eyes brighten as an idea enters his mind. A brilliant, amazing idea that has always been in their grasp and he can't even believe that he didn't think of it sooner. He really is a fucking idiot. "Come and live with me and we'll tell Hopper. He can get your statement and document your injuries. It should be enough to make sure that Max gets out of that house."

Billy opens his mouth to refute the idea but it sounds like it could work, that maybe this is a plan that won't fail. He closes his mouth and his lips pull up into a smile. "You think that would work?"

"Yeah. It can't hurt to try- I mean-"

"I know what you mean Steve, but I'm not some pussy. I don't cry about getting a punch, I can't-"

"Hey, hey." Steve says earnestly as his hands make their way to Billy's arms, then shoulders, and finally to rest along his jaw and neck. "We'll do this one step at a time, okay? I'll be right here with you."

"I don't think that I can. I can't- This-"

"Do you remember when your dad first hit you?"

It's a question from Steve he never really expected. It takes his breath away in the worst possible way as he remembers his mom's dirty blond hair. As he remembers the smell of stale whisky that's all too real considering there's an open bottle in his hands. He remembers the sting of the first hit, of the pain and of the guilt. He remembers the confusion and certainty that it was always going to happen. That there's nothing he can ever do to stop it. He remembers

how angry he was, how angry he still is. How many people he's hurt. How fucked up he really is. His mom was so beautiful.

"Yeah." Billy answers, his voice rough with years of grief.

"Now think about Max going through that." Steve says it gently but Billy knows what he's trying to do and how much it's working. "Focus on her. This isn't about you or your dad, this is about you trying to protect her. Prevent her- or anyone else to go through what you went through. Because if you can't do this for yourself, Billy, or hell even for me, then do it for her."

Billy's eyes that were looking at Steve's shoes move up his body to his big brown doe eyes and he nods. Steve looks so relieved, happy, and proud all rolled into one as he pulls Billy into a lingering kiss that's more comforting than anything. Billy readily accepts it and when the kiss is over he pulls Steve into a tight hug. He feels tears forming but he doesn't cry. He hasn't cried, not really cried since he was a baby. He's not sure if that was his father or his mother who took that ability away. Either way, he always thought it was an assent, but right now it's anything but. All he wants to do is cry but he can't. He can only hold Steve tighter.

If he were to look into a mirror right now, he's not sure he would recognize the Billy Hargrove he's come to know. And maybe that's a good thing.

She really was beautiful, maybe in another life she still would be.

'I love you.' He thinks as he holds Steve closer. 'I don't really know what love is, but I'm pretty fucking sure that I love you.'

35. "She's As Stubborn As Winter And As Kind As The Sun."

Notes for the Chapter:

Three chapters? :P I felt like they all kind of go together so I'm posting them all at once. Enjoy!

"You're not driving my fucking car." Billy says angrily as Steve quickly swipes the keys out of his hands.

"You can barely stand." Steve says with a laugh as Billy struggles to do just that. Between the both of them Billy's the one who ended up drinking most of the bottle, Steve only having a couple of drinks knowing that someone was going to have to drive them home. He always was the more responsible one in this relationship. Even in his drunk mind Billy can remember that. Not that he's very drunk, it takes a lot to get him completely wasted but he did drink a good portion of that bottle and it was whisky. That pretty much explains everything right there. "Hey stop pouting."

Billy looks adorable when he does that, not that Steve would ever say it because he knows that if he did Billy would never do it again and he can't have that. As he tells him to stop though, Billy does it even more and Steve can't help but laugh some more at his antics as he leads him to the passenger's side. He opens the door and as gently as he can, maneuvers Billy into the passenger's seat. He shuts the door and makes his way to the driver's seat, keys ready to sink into the ignition. He's never drove Billy's car before, his precious baby but now he finally has the chance and he's going to enjoy every second of it. Even if it is because of Billy's current state.

"You better not scratch it." Billy says a little languidly as he rests his head against his window.

"No promises." Steve says with a smirk as he backs out of the forest and makes his way onto the main drag. It's sometime in the afternoon when they finally leave and Steve is starving. He's sure that Billy would have been too if he hadn't drunk so much, then maybe they could have gone to the diner or something but since it stands as it is

he makes his way back to his house. There he can get Billy to a bed to sleep the whisky off and he can get some proper food.

“I shouldn’t have drank so much.” Billy says with his eyes closed. Up until then Steve was pretty sure he had fallen asleep.

“Yeah, probably not.”

“I just... Whisky is my mom’s drink. She used it to block him out, guess I thought I could do the same.”

Steve is surprised by Billy’s honest words, but then again liquor always loosens the tongue. He decides while he’s being honest with him that maybe he should ask a few questions. After all how much opportunity does he get to have a real word out of Billy’s mouth? Besides he thought that she was passed on. “What is she like?”

“She’s as stubborn as winter and as kind as the sun.” Billy says, then laughs at his choice of poetic words, but his humour is short lived as he adds sadly, “Was. She’s dead.”

“I’m sorry.” Steve says his hand not on the steering wheel finding Billy’s. To his surprise Billy holds on, warm and sturdy.

“Yeah. Me too. About your mom.”

Steve doesn’t really know what to say after that so he squeezes Billy’s hand and focuses on driving Billy’s precious baby. They make it back to his house quickly enough though and it’s a little bit of a struggle to get Billy into the house as he staggers along. Steve has his arms around him and is doing his best to guide him but Billy is naturally bigger than him and it takes a few minutes longer than usual. Once they get in it’s a whole other feat to get Billy up into bed. Steve struggles for a few minutes with whether he should put Billy into the guest bedroom or his own but Billy makes the decision for them both when he leads the way to Steve’s bedroom.

“Nice bed.” Billy says into Steve’s pillow as he lays down. “Missed this bed.”

Steve smiles slightly at that as he takes Billy’s boots off. “I’m sure it missed you too.”

“Missed you more.”

Steve’s heart swells. “Me too.”

Billy doesn’t say anything more as Steve gets his boots off and pulls a blanket over him. He would have taken his jeans off but considering he’s already fast asleep it’s probably better to leave well enough alone for now. He needs to make a phone call anyway. That will be an even more difficult thing to do, not for him but for what it means to Billy. That affects Steve more than he can say. It’s probably why when he leaves the room with one last kiss to Billy’s forehead that he takes his time going down the stairs to the phone.

“Fuck, okay.” Steve says to himself as he faces said phone, a new one that he got a couple of days ago after his little meltdown. He may have embellished the story a little as to why it got broken in the first place when talking to his dad about the money to replace it but that all doesn’t matter right now as he rings the familiar number of the police station.

“Hawkins’s police station, Brenda speaking.”

“Hey, is Jim there?”

“One moment.” Brenda says as he’s put on hold but it doesn’t last long before the phone picks up and said man answers.

“Yeah?”

“Hey Hopper, it’s- it’s Steve.” Steve says nervously.

“Hey, Steve what’s going on? Aren’t you supposed to be in class?” He sounds stern as he says that last part but Steve ignores it and the question.

“I need you to come by later. Maybe about eight or nine? Uh, don’t wear the uniform though.”

“Sure. What’s going on? Are you okay, kid?”

“Yeah- No, no not really. You know what, make it nine.” Steve says as he falters slightly at Hopper’s clear concern for him.

"I'll be there." Hopper promises.

"Thanks." Steve hangs up. He takes a deep breath as he lets go of the phone and takes a moment to feel a little bit of weight leave his shoulders. The moment is soon gone as his stomach chooses to rumble and remind him that he's only had an apple to eat all day. "Right, food."

He spends the rest of the afternoon and evening having a couple of beers and two meals. He watches a couple of VHS's and spends a few hours watching Billy sleep. Which sounds creepy but he can hardly believe that Billy is really here and that he's staying. He would sleep himself but he's too damn nervous to even attempt a nap. His leg shakes with the anxiety as the clock ticks away the time. It's around eight when he really starts to get on edge. Billy still isn't awake and Hopper will be here soon. Maybe he should wake him up but he looks so peaceful, he can't bear to do that. To wake him up to the shit storm he's going to have to face, not yet anyway.

It's quarter after nine when there's a knock at the door. Steve opens it quickly already waiting by the door since the clock struck nine. He finds a non-uniformed Hopper on the other side as per his request and that settles his nerves somewhat. Without the uniform it's just one friend helping out another. Which will help Billy to relax and say what he needs to. Maybe he should have waited a little longer or woken up and asked Billy again if he's sure that this is okay with him but if he did that he knows that Billy would have backed out, or waited. Both options not good, especially with not one but two lives in danger. Maybe even three if you count Susan which Billy clearly doesn't want to for whatever reasons that he has.

"Hey, kid. You going to invite me in?" Hopper asks with some concern as he sees the state Steve's in, all his nervous energy clear on his features.

"Yeah." Steve says, his thoughts being pushed to the back of his mind as he focuses on this moment. "Come in."

36. "Why Was She Listening To Someone Like Me?"

Notes for the Chapter:

Another chapter already? I'm on a roll. :3

"Hey, we're almost done." Steve says to Billy, snapping him out of his thoughts. His eyes still seem lost though like he's here but not really here. It's scary and unnerving for Steve but he figures that it's probably the only way to deal with what's going on. All of these questions and exams that are probably way more invasive than Billy would have ever wanted from a complete stranger. The X-rays and taking photos of his injuries were something he needed Steve to be in the room just to get through, all though he won't admit that. Not to mention that he threatened the photographer and Hopper about them not getting his face in the shot. All around it's been a tough day at the small hospital in this small town known as Hawkins.

"Yeah." Billy acknowledges Steve with one simple word.

Steve wants to say more but then the nurse is there with Hopper hot on her heels. She needs some blood and even though Steve wants to be there for Billy every step of the way he has to look in the opposite direction as the needle is inserted into his skin and then his vein. He was never good with blood and now more than ever that becomes apparent as he starts to feel sick to his stomach at the sight he's trying to avoid. One good thing comes out of it though and that's Billy's laugh at his reaction. It tells Steve that he's still there, the same old Billy who can be an asshole. The asshole that he-

"It's not funny, asshole." Steve tells him without much bite as he's afraid anymore pressure into the words will send up his lunch.

"Kind of is. Your face is all green." He says it with a laugh and Steve can't help but match his smile, not because he finds it funny but because hearing Billy laugh is everything. He hasn't heard a genuine laugh from him in so long. He hasn't really heard much from him at all in the past few weeks.

"Ha. Ha. Ha."

“Boys.” Hopper says interrupting them as the nurse finishes and walks out of the small patient room that Billy’s occupied on and off throughout the day. “We have to talk serious now. Billy, it’s going to take a few days- maybe a week- two at the latest before charges will be brought against your father. All of the evidence has to be-”

“Charges? No, no this is just to get Max out of there.”

“We can’t do that until there are charges or she makes a complaint.”

Billy looks angry but he doesn’t yell or lose his cool even though it seems like to Steve and Hopper both that it can happen any second. “Alright, fine, shit fine. After the charges are laid, then she gets out of there, right?”

“Yes. Pending the trial. She’ll be in foster care until a verdict is made.” Hopper explains as calmly as he can.

“Fuck.” Billy says, his hands reaching for a cigarette and a lighter. He’s no longer in the hospital gown which is a big relief and makes it more than able for him to get out of that room as soon as possible but before he can Hopper stops him.

“Wait. I need to tell you something. We’ve found a witness. Or- one of my deputies did a little digging today. Not like they got much going on. The whole upside down shit has stopped for now.”

“What did he find?” Asks Steve, bringing him back to the matter at hand.

“Said someone named Mrs. Sullivan, a neighbor of yours back in California saw your father hit you. She says you came to her place and you talked.” Hopper explains to them both but he looks at Billy as he says it.

Billy huffs in surprise. “That old bag? Why was she listening to someone like me? She hated me.”

“So this conversation with her did happen.”

“Yeah, told me I should hit him back. I- I didn’t though.”

“Okay, this is good, kid. With her as a witness and your injuries we can get him locked up no problem. He might even consider taking a deal. No trial that way.” Hopper says in some relief.

“You think?” Billy asks not really believing what he’s saying.

“Yeah, I’ll call James back and tell him to take down her statement. Of course someone will have to go out there and talk to her face to face but it should be no trouble once we talk to the judge... I’ll be right back then we’ll get your car Steve and you both can get back.”

Once he’s gone Billy hangs his head in his hands, gripping his hair as it all sinks in. He really does need that cigarette now. Steve must read his mind because he says, “Let’s go outside and wait for him.” Once they’re there Billy doesn’t hesitate in lighting one up and taking a large puff. He smokes it down in less than five minutes and is on his second when Steve speaks again. “This is good news. He can go down for what did and Max will get out of there.”

“Yeah, into shitty fucking foster care. Like that’s any better.” Billy says regretfully, like maybe he is making a mistake with all of this shit.

“No, no, fuck don’t say that. Hopper will find her a good place.”

“You sound so sure, of everything. I hope for Max’s sake that you are.”

Before Steve can respond Hopper is walking out of the big doors of the hospital and saying, “There you are. Let’s go.”

“You didn’t forget your car keys again, did you?” Billy asks Steve with a teasing smirk.

“I got them right here, jackass.” Steve responds holding them up. Billy laughs at him as he remembers his panicked face this morning when he didn’t have them. They were going to get Steve’s car first but after that debacle of having to go back and get them they were late for their appointment at the hospital. The trip to go back and get Steve’s car was then postponed to now.

“I forgot to ask,” Hopper starts of saying as they get into the car, “but

Billy, did you want to go back to the house and grab your things? I'll come with you."

"Come or don't come. I'm not afraid of him." Billy says it as he takes another puff of his cigarette. He says it so convincingly that Hopper simply nods his head and starts driving, but for Steve he can see right through it. Billy is anything but not afraid, he's terrified. Completely scared shitless. He's confirmed of these thoughts when he puts his hand on Billy's knee and instead of shooing it away because someone's here and they might get caught, Billy puts his own hand on top of his and squeezes.

Hopper turns onto Billy's street and says to him, "Scared or not, I'm going with you."

37. "I Know I'm Awful, I Can't Even Cry."

"Stay here." Billy says to Steve as he holds up his hand, stopping him from getting out of Hopper's car.

"What? No. Why?" Steve asks confused and a little hurt.

"I don't want him seeing you and- Finding out where I am."

Before Steve can respond Hopper interrupts with, "He's right. You stay here and I'll go with him."

"That's not a good idea either." Billy interjects but Hopper is hearing none of it.

"I'm coming, son, let's go."

Billy feels nervous as they both get out of the car, leaving Steve in the backseat probably pouting and worried. Billy would have wanted nothing more than to have him with him, he makes him feel stable and calm. Less angry and violent, more like he can handle things without going off. Without exploding, but he doesn't want Steve getting hurt. He knows that his father will piece things together if he sees him, find out where he is or worse do something to Steve. Do something when Billy's not there to protect him, which is a cowardly move but his father's always been a cowardly man. He realized this when they moved from California to here. When instead of facing the music his father ran away from it.

"You ready for this?" Hopper asks Billy one last time as they make it up to the Hargrove's front door. The night has descended around them quickly and it's hard to see anything, only the small porch light gives any sign of life from inside but Billy knows they're in there. That he's in there. Can he really do this? Can he really get away? Is it really this easy? Hopper and Steve seem to think so but he knows how cruel life is, how hard it bites. He's not even sure if telling Hopper was the right thing but Steve was right about trusting him. He does trust him and he'll trust him with this. What else does he really have to lose? The only thing he cares about is his car and Steve, maybe Max too. Other than that there's nothing left for him

here.

“Yeah. Let’s get it over with.” He opens the door, not bothering to knock as it is his house, although it doesn’t really feel like it in this moment.

“Billy, where have you-” His father stops mid-sentence as he takes in the appearance of Hopper. Despite his casual clothes he knows who he is, they’ve met before when they first moved into town. He stopped by as a welcome or maybe it was Neil who stopped by, Billy’s not really sure. He was out getting shitfaced at the time. “Hello, can I help you?”

“Hello Mr. Hargrove.” Hopper responds. “I’m giving Billy a ride, then we’ll be out of your hair.”

“We?” Neil looks from Hopper to Billy, anger in his eyes but the rest of his features betray no other emotion.

“Yeah.” Billy says it quickly looking down, not able to meet his father’s eyes. “I’m moving out.”

“Son, let’s talk about this-”

Now that’s a strange reaction to hearing your son whose still in school is moving out. No, why? Or what’s wrong? If Hopper wasn’t convinced of this man’s guilt before he is now as he steps forward and says for Billy who clearly is having trouble confronting the man, “He’s eighteen, Mr. Hargrove. He can do as he wishes. We simply came for his things.”

Billy doesn’t have much, a few shirts and pants, some deodorant and a few knickknacks. His father with Susan who came out of the kitchen from her baking watch him and Hopper gather the items and put them in a garbage bag provided from the couple. It’s a sad sight but Billy doesn’t let any emotion into his hard façade as he picks up the things he needs. He goes to grab a blanket but his father quickly interjects and says that he can’t take anything other than his clothes and the things he bought with his own money which means practically everything had to be left behind. He’s not allowed to take even his fucking ashtray but he doesn’t say anything about it, only

nods his head and carries on.

When it's all collected and they're out on the sidewalk his father says from his position in the doorway, "You'll always be my son, Billy, don't forget everything I've done for you. And don't ever forget about our little chats. Obedience and respect." With that the front door is slammed shut and Billy stands there, garbage bag in hand full of all he owns in this world aside from his car feeling like he's been punched in the gut. He feels like he's been punched, gutted, and then hollowed out. He feels like he's missed something- as though he's lost a piece of himself. He's not sure yet if that's a good thing or not, he doesn't wait around to find out. Steve's waiting for him.

"Hey." Steve's brown eyes are big and full of worry. Billy never wants him to worry especially about him. He's fine. He was going to leave that place eventually. Now's just as good a time as any.

"Hey." He says it with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. Steve wants to hug him but he knows better and instead he tries to return the smile. There's not much luck but then again there never really has been for these two. The only luck they've ever had is finding each other, which isn't much when they think about how screwed up they are as individuals and more importantly as they are together. That doesn't matter now though because they're already at the school and Steve has his car back. They say goodbye to Hopper and head home.

"Long day." Steve says at an attempt at conversation.

"No shit." Billy replies as he drops his garbage bag by the kitchen counter.

"You want a beer?"

"Fuck yes. Was wondering when you were going to ask."

Steve cracks a smile at that and reaches into the fridge pulling out the beers. He hands one to Billy and keeps one for himself. They both take a long sip and then Billy says, "So you're stuck with me."

"Seems that way." Steve replies as he smiles but it's not truly happy, not because of Billy being here but because of how upset Billy is.

He'd never admit it and behind that hard face, can barely show it but Steve sees. He always sees. "I know that wasn't easy but you were great."

"Fuck off." Billy answers as he takes another drink. "I know what I am. I know I'm awful, I can't even cry."

"Why would want to? I thought only girls cried." He's joking of course and it does the trick as Billy smiles and says, "Fuck you. But you know what, something good did come out of it?"

"Yeah? What's that?"

Billy smirks, placing his beer on the counter behind him as he walks closer to Steve. Never one for small chat his hand goes on Steve back, pushing him closer to himself as his other holds his jaw in place, outlining his lips. "You and me. We got this whole fucking house to ourselves."

Steve smiles and it's everything.

38. "You're My Best Friend, I'll Love You Til One Of Us Dies."

"Nance, what are you doing here?" Steve asks surprised as he answers the door to find her on the other side holding a stack of what is most likely homework.

"Come on, Steve, I heard what happened. Besides you haven't been answering your phone." Nancy sounds concerned at the last part. "Now are you going to let me in?"

"Yeah, right. Sure come in."

She nods her head and walks into the familiar house. She's been here before many times when she and Steve were dating and then later on when they would have their meetings here but that hasn't happened in a while. The whole upside down taking a seemingly innocent break for the time being. Something that Hopper is pretty happy about considering that Eleven wants to go off on her own and try to solve this herself. Now, without danger lurking Hopper has a pretty good argument for keeping the search for answers based in Hawkins. No running off and not telling him. No coming back drugged up because she used her psychic powers to force a certain hard headed teen into taking her.

"I got your homework Steve, and Billy's." Nancy says carefully as she takes a seat in the living room. "I thought you'd want to give Billy's to him yourself. Unless he's already here."

Steve stops, like a deer in headlights as he stares at Nancy's insinuation. He quickly back tracks and says nervously, "What? No, no, why would he be here? He's not, no..."

"Relax Steve. Jonathan overheard his mom and Hopper."

"Oh, shit. Great, so everyone knows, huh?" Steve says nervously already with that fear building up. If Billy's father gets word than it's all over. Steve and Billy will be in danger because there's no way a man like that will leave things. He'll come after them and Billy will get hurt again. "Fuck."

"Steve, Steve! It's okay, just me and Jonathan know. And Joyce and Hopper but that's it. I mean I'm sure the deputies and maybe Brenda know but that's it. It's alright." Nancy explains as Steve starts pacing across his living room, but at her words he stops.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You can't do that to me, Nance." Steve says breathlessly as he falls into the arm chair across from her. "Billy's dad, fuck he'll kill him."

"I'm sorry, Steve." Nancy says, her face changing to worry as she takes in the impact of Steve's words. He sounds scared beyond belief, something that Nancy's never see him before not even when he was facing that Demogorgon with his crazy bat. "You really care about him."

"Of course I do."

"Then we'll get him behind bars and Billy will be fine. You'll be fine. Maybe he'll even stop being such an asshole after."

Steve laughs. "I really know how to pick them, huh? First you, in love with someone else and now him."

"Thanks."

"You know what I mean."

"I do." Nancy replies seriously now. "I want you to be happy Steve, I just hope that Billy can rise up to the challenge. He's not exactly reliable or sane- Stable. You know what I mean."

"That's because of his father, Nancy. He turned him into that. Underneath it all, he cares. He has a good heart and he can be a good man. I can feel it." Steve says earnestly as he looks at her, desperate for her, for anyone to understand.

"You're my best friend, I'll love you til one of us dies. I'll always be here for you, and if that means being here for him, then I'm here. Why else would I bring this crate of homework for you two?"

Steve laughs and nods his head. "Is it really that bad?"

"Yes! We have final examinations in two weeks, Steve. Two weeks. You better be studying. Billy too." Nancy says it teasingly but Steve knows she's serious. She's too good of a friend to let him fail, and now Billy too. Steve knows she means what she says, about Billy, that she'll be here for him too because of him. Nancy's a good person, what she did to him with Jonathan was shitty and no excuse makes that right but he knows what it means to love now. He knows what it means to feel that passion with someone, to want them no matter what. So he gets it, he understands, and they're okay.

"Where's Billy anyway?" Nancy asks as she unloads the homework, separating them into different piles based on subject and urgency to get them done.

"Sleeping." Steve replies, then with a smile, "I wore him out."

"Gross! Steve, he's wearing off on you too damn much."

Steve can hardly disagree with that and finds himself laughing as an unsuspecting Billy does the same. He stands in the hallway and bites his tongue to prevent the laugh from escaping through, not wanting to give up his position. He wasn't planning on ease dropping, that's not the kind of person he is. He always takes thing head on and damn the consequences but with his father, he's maybe a little more cautious. If it was his father, the element of surprise would have been vital. He wouldn't let anything happen to Steve on his watch, but then instead of him it was a teenage girl. The one who broke Steve's heart all those months ago, making him look for release from someone else. That someone else turning out to be him.

He never really liked Nancy, not just because of what she did to Steve but because he always kind of thought she was a whiny bitch. That Steve was far better off without her but now listening to her, maybe he had it the wrong way around. Sure, what she did to him was fucking awful but her now, doing this for Steve and himself even though she hates him, it's something else. Something really fucking good, something that Billy would never do. If he was in her position he would do the complete opposite. Maybe it's Billy that Steve doesn't deserve. After all, he's only ever given Steve more hurt. More

pain. He even saw someone else, Alice, even though she meant nothing. Maybe he's the awful one, not that he already knew that but for Steve maybe he's the shitty choice. Maybe he's the one that needs to say goodbye. Steve would be a whole hell of a lot safer without him. Hell, probably happier too.

He turns away from the pair and heads back to Steve's bedroom where he's been staying. All of these thoughts, everything that's happened is fucking him up in more ways than one. He doesn't know what to fucking do anymore. It makes his blood boil and the anger overflow. He wants to hit something, to throw something and so he does. Steve comes running because of course he does, Nancy right on his heels. But he doesn't get angry, he doesn't tell Billy to get out. Hell he doesn't even throw a punch his way, he just looks sad. Worried, even. He tells Nancy he'll see her later and then he gets Billy a beer which he puts on his aching knuckles. Plaster from the wall still on his skin from where he punched a hole in the wall.

How could Steve ever love someone like him? How can he ever return the favor?

39. "Teach Me How To Love You."

"We're not watching Doctor Who again." Billy says to Steve as he holds up the VHS's to him. Steve doesn't even argue with him on it, he simply goes through the stack looking for something else. This tells Billy all he needs to know about how Steve is feeling toward him right now. Not angry or pissed that he made a hole in his bedroom wall with his fist but worried. Sympathetic, maybe even pitiful toward him. Most of all, there's worry in Steve's brow as he looks through the movies. Billy wants to smooth out his brow and tell him he's sorry. That he'll never do it again but those would all be lies, mostly. He is sorry, somewhat but he can't say he'll never do it again, that his anger won't get the best of him some time again in the future because to tell the truth it probably will.

"What about Ghostbusters?" Steve asks him as he holds up the VHS. It's a little torn on the paper cover and it looks worn even though it's brand new. Billy knows already why, it's because the kids love that movie and every time they're here they watch it. Or else they borrow it and it never comes back in the same condition it left. He remembers Steve complaining about it one night with annoyance but there was also the small feeling of fondness for the kids. He's always had a soft spot for them Billy's noticed and that probably will never change, no matter how many movies they wreck of his.

"It's fine." Billy says a little distracted as he adjusts the frozen peas on his hand slightly. The swelling that was once so prominent and red has gone down drastically after he had his first beer.

Steve nods his head and puts in the movie. Truth be told neither of them are really up for a movie but it beats doing their homework in awkward silence. They tried that at first and Billy was way too anxious to keep that up so he quickly snapped at Steve to put on a movie or something which he is now doing. He didn't even complain or have a snappy comeback to that, a warning sign for Billy. It tells him that whatever emotion Steve is feeling and the thoughts that he's thinking are so large, taking over his whole brain that he can't even be himself. Billy knows Steve overthinks things which is usually when they have a good fuck. Steve is much better after that, but this

doesn't really feel like the time. He can't believe he's thinking this, but it's true. Besides he already tried that angle and Steve turned him down in a hurry, claiming their homework was waiting. Homework over sex? Yeah something's defiantly going on in that big head of his.

"It's 'cause I punched a hole through your bedroom wall isn't it?" Billy says breaking the silence, and when did he become the one in this relationship who does that?

"What? No. It's nothing, don't worry about it." Steve says offhandedly but Billy isn't buying it.

"Come on, take a hit at me if that will make you feel better. Come on King Steve!"

"I'm not going to hit you. You've had enough of that for one life."

"Fuck you." Billy says and there's no snark, only anger. He goes to get up and leave, maybe buy some more cigarettes. He just needs to get out of here before he's the one hitting Steve instead of a wall.

"Wait! Wait! Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that." He sounds genuinely sorry.

"Yeah, whatever. Obviously you're pissed at me."

"I'm not- I'm not angry, I just- Did you put your hand through the wall because of Nancy? Because we're over. Have been for months now. You know that. She's my bes-"

"Your best friend. Yeah, I heard." Billy interrupts him.

"You were listening to us? I knew it." Steve says nodding his head as his suspicions are confirmed.

"Whatever. I didn't punch the wall because of Nancy. My head-everything is just so screwed up. I'm screwed up, Steve, you know that."

It's more honestly than Steve was expecting. He thought that Billy would simply shrug him off and leave. Go get a bottle of whisky and drink it away, or go do something even more stupid. That's generally

how he deals with things but instead he's here, talking to Steve. He's not yelling, he's not hitting, he's actually talking and that is something that would have never happened when they first met. The way he says it though, 'screwed up,' he really believes it. It's not like he's wrong but he doesn't have to be this way forever, he can change. He is changing.

Steve's face falls and he can't help but walk up to him, his hand finding Billy's cheek and jaw. Billy's eyes are storm clouds, desperate and furious at probably himself or his dad. There's rain there too, the sadness that comes with the inability to do what he wants, to make his mind work the way he needs it to. Steve says his next words very carefully as he looks into those eyes, gentle and caring, "I know baby, but you- you won't always be angry."

"I don't know why I said what I said in the hallway at school." Billy's voice is hollow as he says it, unable to find the right emotion that he's supposed to feel in this moment. "I don't know what the fuck love is. I don't know how to love you. There's better people out there who do know."

"Billy, you're..." Steve stops, not able to find the right words to express what he needs to say, so instead he leans in and kisses him. He conveys everything he's feeling into that kiss and Billy takes it all in desperately. When they pull away Billy's looking at him like he's seen the sun for the first time.

"Teach me how to love you." Billy whispers.

Steve kisses him again long and hard, when he pulls away he interlocks their fingers together and guides him to his bedroom. Billy follows contently.

40. "I'll Learn Not To Look At You With Scorn."

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you all are enjoying the multiple chapter updates recently. It most likely won't be like this forever but for now I've been writing a lot so... Here you are! :)

Steve traces seemingly meaningless patterns into Billy's chest as they lay in his bed peacefully. Steve's head rests on Billy's shoulder as Billy smokes a cigarette, his other arm around Steve holding him close. They went slow this time, taking in each other without quick touches only gentle ones. Steve guided them this time, he was the one in control and Billy followed along without complaint. He wants to know how to love him, to be the man he needs. It makes him sound like a girl, some idiot but Steve does that to him. He's turned his whole world upside down and inside out. He's changed the way he feels and the way he sees things now.

"We still have the rest of the weekend until I have to go back to school." Steve says to Billy casually. "What should we do until then?"

"I'm sure we'll figure something out." Billy says with a smirk. "Not that there's much weekend left."

"Details."

"Tomorrow's Sunday, babe, remember?"

"Yeah, but that just means we have all Sunday." Steve tries as he looks to Billy with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"Okay then. In that case maybe you better skip a couple more days with me." Billy responds.

"Yeah? Ah, shit. I can't, someone's going to have to hand our homework in and get the new stuff."

"Homework, fuck, who cares?"

Billy hasn't really shown an interest in homework, finding it boring and

pointless. He has no home, all he's got is that job at the garage a couple days a week. It's not like he's smart enough to get into college nor does he have the money. Steve will go and leave him, but he'll make a good life for himself. Billy will never have that option, not that he needs much. A place with heat and enough money for his cigarettes is all he really needs, right? What else could he possibly want?

"Come on, Billy. We have to study. You too." Steve says, pouting, then with a smirk, "I'll make it worth your while."

Billy matches his smirk at those words. "Oh? Is that so?"

Billy leans in as Steve reaches up, their lips meeting in a heated kiss. If the first round was anything to go by, the second will be fucking amazing. Billy knows he let Steve have control the first time tonight, but now it's his turn. The things he can't wait to do to his body, to make him gasp and moan. He loves the way those sounds fall from Steve's lips. The look in his eyes at the pleasure, it gets him off just to see. The things he has planned will surely do that now and then some.

"Fuck." Steve says as Billy kisses down his chest to a nipple, bringing it in-between his mouth. He sucks and tugs. Steve's always been sensitive here, something that Billy takes great advantage of.

"Billy, tell me this isn't what it looks like?" Billy freezes at that voice. His mouth stops in its movements and he leans back. Steve's face is petrified. He looks more terrified than Billy's ever seen before and a stab of pain enters Billy's heart just at that sight. "Billy."

Billy turns around, the sheet pulling over his groin as he does so. He's naked but his father doesn't even notice, all he cares about is the other boy next to him. Billy sees him look to Steve and then to himself, and he knows what's coming. He knows he should do something, anything, but he can't. He's frozen into place and it's just like when he was back there. All he can do is say, "Yes sir?"

"What did we talk about?" His father asks.

"Respect and obedience."

"That's right."

That's when all hell breaks loose. His father grabs him by the hair and drags him out of the bed. He slams him against the wall, right below where he put a hole through it. Where he was more like his father than he ever wants to admit. He's slammed against it a couple of times and then suddenly it stops. He's left leaning against the wall, his vision blurry as he watches Neil walk over to Steve who still sits there lost in fear. He doesn't move, doesn't even try to defend himself as his father back hands him across the face. Billy physically flinches at that, but he doesn't make a sound of protest or do anything. He's powerless, he can't even move.

Neil hits him again.

"Ahh, fuck." Billy's voice is quiet and Steve never would have woken up just from that, it's the kicking that does it. Billy's thrashing against him. Where his arm used to be draped across him is now cold air. Billy is as far from him as the bed will allow, his face scrunched up in distress. Steve feels his heart break at the sight. He quickly reaches over and tries to reassure him with touch but that's a rookie move with Billy and he's swatted away immediately. He doesn't try to touch him again and instead tries with words.

"Hey, Billy, it's okay." Steve whispers. "Shh... It's okay, it's just a dream. Your safe, I'm here."

It takes a few minutes but finally Billy's eyes snap open and he's staring up into the ceiling. His breathing is rapid and heavy. He seems still lost in whatever nightmare he was having. Steve can't bear to watch it and decides to try something else. Very gently, without touching him he crawls over and leans over him so that his face is in his line of vision. He continues with his soothing words and soon enough Billy starts to fall out of his daze. He very slowly focuses on Steve's features until the dream is all but faded from his mind's eye.

"Steve?" He asks slowly, almost like he's uncertain.

"Yeah, it's me Billy." Steve responds, he wants to say something more but suddenly Billy is touching him, searching.

"Are you okay? Fuck, are you okay? He didn't hit you too hard did he?"

“What? No, no I’m fine. Who are you talking about?”

“My dad, he was here, he-” Billy explains hurriedly.

“He’s not here.” Steve says. “He never was. I’m fine, Billy, Billy! I’m fine. I’m okay.”

After a few minutes of reassuring him Billy begins to believe him and instead of searching for injuries that aren’t there, pulls Steve into his chest. He holds him tightly and Steve holds on back. Billy still seems shaken up and soon enough they are rearranged where Billy is leaning against him. Steve strokes his hair carefully, knowing how much he likes that as Billy listens to his heart beat. Listen to how he’s safe and here, and okay.

“Fuck, Steve.” Billy says after what is probably close to an hour after the dream that seemed so real. “I can’t lose you.”

“You won’t.” Steve says seriously.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to be good to you. I’ll learn not to look at you with scorn, I’ll keep you safe. My dad is never going to hurt you. I won’t let him.”

“I know, and you’re not going to lose me, Billy. I can take care of myself too, you know. I’m not some girl.”

“No.” Billy agrees. “You’re defiantly not.”

41. "Don't Expect Me To Change."

Notes for the Chapter:

Well, things are starting to get a little more interesting, aren't they?... :3

"You ready?" Steve asks as he fixes his hair.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Billy asks back as he fixes up his cologne, spreading more on his body than necessary in Steve's opinion.

"Well the shiner I gave you looks better but still."

"You're worse off than me." It was true, Steve had a couple of more bruises than Billy, mostly due to the fact that Billy is bigger. When it comes to just fists he would win in a fight between them hands down. It could have been worse though, like the first time Billy beat the shit out of him, compared to then he barely has a scratch. Even so, Billy has been treating him a little bit nicer. He might even say gentler, like he's trying to say sorry with his touches instead of the words. He did say sorry once but once is a little too much for Billy Hargrove, even if he is trying to be better. For Steve's sake, not necessarily for his own.

"Whatever. I've already gone back, no one really cares but I'm sure they'll be patting you on the back. At least now that we're okay they'll see that and the rumours will die down." Steve explains.

"Rumours?" Billy asks, ignoring the whole mention of people seeing they're getting along, for the time being.

"Yeah, apparently I slept with Alice on the Friday before at that party even though I was nowhere near it."

"Fuck, Alice."

"What?" Steve turns and looks at him, his comb stopping its movements.

"It's nothing. Forgot to end things. I guess I can now, Neil won't be

looking over my shoulder anymore.”

“Right, Neil. That’s why you have to break up with her.”

He sounds pissed and Billy doesn’t like that, but it makes him angry that he is, because doesn’t Steve get it? He had to date her, he had to have a cover. He couldn’t have Neil getting suspicious. Least of all coming here when Steve’s all alone, defenseless against him. He would have nearly killed Steve if it ever came to that. He was just trying to protect him, he supposes, what else would you call it?

“Look, it’s over with her. For whatever reason, so just stop sounding so fucking angry and jealous all the time.” Billy says, turning to look at him.

“Yeah, whatever. Do you want to drive or should I?” Steve asks, dropping the whole Alice thing.

“What are you talking about? We’re taking our own cars.”

Before Steve can respond to that Billy is already walking to the kitchen. He takes out an apple as Steve is hot on his heels. He looks angry again but Billy knew this was coming, or well he thought maybe it would. He also thought that maybe Steve was starting to understand what’s at stake, but the look in his eyes right now tells him that he was wrong. That all his hoping was for nothing.

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“We take our own cars, Steve, no one can know I’m here.” Billy says, trying his hardest to keep his own anger at bay.

“Why? Why does it matter if they know you’re staying here?” Steve throws his hands in the air as he asks it.

“Why? Because, Steve, because if Neil finds out where I am- If this gets back to him you’ll be burying me next week.” Billy is in his face now and he’s deathly serious that Steve can’t help but take a step back. It’s not until Billy says his next words though that Steve’s blood finally runs cold. “You have no idea what he’s capable of.”

Billy’s breathe smells like his spearmint toothpaste that he must have

used before Steve got up. That's how close he is to him now and Steve doesn't want to be intimidated by Billy because they're past this, at least they're supposed to be so he pushes Billy back and he lets him. Billy gives a cold smile after he takes a step back by Steve's hands and bites into his apple. Steve isn't scared of him, he never has been, he knows that Billy won't ever hurt him, not like that, but looking at him now- He sees how much damage he could inflict, not on him of course, but someone else if he really wanted to. It makes his claim of getting hit by his father seem false somehow if he hadn't seen the bruises he would have believed that it was. Anyone would, look at him, how could he let a man smaller than him beat the shit out of him every day? If his case ever goes to court, what jury will believe him? Would they care? Would it matter to them?

Little does Steve know, these are the questions that keep Billy up at night.

"Don't expect me to change." Billy says as he chews on his apple. "Not that much a few days."

He pushes past Steve and makes his way to his car. He says something else, under his breath where Steve can barely hear, "I'm just trying to protect you, you fucking idiot."

"So, Steve-o." Dustin asks later that day as Steve picks him up from school. The tires on his bike apparently having been popped. It will be a couple of days until his mom can get him a new one, would have been a few weeks if not for Dustin's constant nagging, causing Steve to chip in for it. A feat that made Mrs. Henderson call him, 'a darling boy.' Steve blushed in embarrassment at that and Dustin couldn't help but let out a whine of, 'Moommmmmm!'

"What's up buddy?" Steve asks as he turns onto the main road, heading toward Dustin's house.

"I heard Billy moved out."

"Oh, did he?"

"Yep." Dustin says as Steve taps his finger on his steering wheel trying to play it cool. "But he's still at school, wonder where he's

living.”

“Mmm.” Steve makes a noise of acknowledgment.

“Hopper’s acting weird.” Dustin prompts.

“Is he?”

“Cut the crap Steve. I know you know something.”

“Oh, would you look at that you’re home, buddy.” Steve says as he pulls up in the Henderson’s driveway.

“Yeah, buddy. Hey by the way, I haven’t been to your house in like three weeks.”

“It’s only been a week Dustin. You better get in, you got a ton of homework, remember?”

“Right.” Dustin says as he squints his eyes at Steve, trying to find some kind of obvious tell. “I’m on to you. You and Hopper both. Max is suspicious even and we’ll figure it out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out.” Steve says as nonchalantly as possible.

“I’m on to you.” Dustin says not backing down as he slowly gets out of the car. Steve wastes no time in backing out and getting the hell out of there once Dustin’s shut the door. Before he can though, Dustin yells after him, “I’m on to you Steve! He’s evil! Don’t forget that! I’m on to you, buddy!”

42. "I Never Loved You Enough."

His house is just as he remembers it. There's clothes all over his mom's bed, her empty bottles laying along with the mess. There's the stale smell of vomit in the air as he remembers it from the day she died. It's gross and makes him feel sick to the stomach but he doesn't throw up. His grief is too strong for that. He feels the overwhelming sadness more than he does any other physical sensation. It's overpowering him. It takes over every inch of himself, every fiber of his being. He wants nothing more than to reach out to her and bring her close. Hold on to her as a child would do to their mother when they're afraid. When the world is too big and terrifying, but he can't. She's not there, the bed is empty.

"Mom?" He calls into the empty room, but he hears nothing in return, not at first anyway, but when he turns around she is there. Her long dirty blonde hair hangs around her and its cleaner and shinier than he's ever seen it before. Her white dress flows, untied- clean. Her feet are bare and pale as her brown eyes gleam with happiness. She has a smile that brings out one in himself even though that grief is strong, that sadness of her being gone. Because this isn't real, it never is.

"Billy." She says it softly but it's so clear to him, like a bell and that's not right. Every time they meet like this she is silent. She only smiles, staring at him and letting him know that she's there. He feels that familiar grief every time too, it carries on through the next day after because she is gone. Seeing her here, now it's not real, not really. Even if it was, it's only a glimpse, a glimmer of something that's long gone.

"Mom." He says to her as he lets himself have this moment, smiling tentatively.

"My boy, I've missed you."

"You've been gone a long time."

Her smile becomes saddened as she responds with, "I know, sweetie. I know you missed me when I was here and more now that I'm gone."

"I always miss you." It's the truth, but not entirely. He does miss her all the time but he also misses what she was supposed to be. What she still is

supposed to be, a mother. Someone who loves unconditionally, someone who holds him and tells him it's going to be okay. Someone who protects him with her life, who never lets anything bad happen to him. Someone who never would have let him become this thing- this monster in so many other's eyes. Someone who cares forever.

"I always miss you, too. I never loved you enough. I know that. I know I was never there for you."

"You weren't."

"But I am now. I'm looking out for you, Billy, from here I am." She sounds so sincere, so honest.

"How?" Billy asks, confused and a little angry. "How can you?"

Billy sometimes thinks back to when he was younger, to before. He tries to picture him as a baby. His mom so happy to see him, to hold him and who loved him instantly. He pictures his mom kissing him and telling him that she loves him that she'll always be there. His father's never in these fruitless dreams, he's dead before he was born. Instead his mom takes on any parental role he will need and will ever need. He thinks about him, maybe three years old, back when he was innocent and how his mom would make sure to keep him that way. To keep him safe.

He then likes to think about him getting older, scraping his knee and his mom kissing it better instead of finding her in her bed. He likes to think of his mom making him breakfast in the morning and walking him to the bus the next morning. Not getting up after his father first beats him, scared and sad, alone. He thinks of him going through puberty and as a mother she does her best to guide him, not his father giving him the 'respect and responsibility' speech. He thinks of his mother saying she wants a change, then they move to Hawkins. He meets Steve and she loves him as she loves Billy. And when she finds out about him and Steve, she's confused at first but accepts him with an open heart instead of the fists and warnings he gets from a shitty father. He pictures going to college with a mom waiting at home who loves him unconditionally, not the reality that consumes him every time he opens his eyes. The painful, horrible, and yet sometimes happy reality he deals with. He would trade everything now for that life, for that mother, but he can't. Instead he's stuck with the ghost of this one standing in front of him.

"Steve, he loves you." She simply says at his questioning of 'how?' "He'll love you more as the days go by, and you him."

Billy doesn't know what to say to that, so he says nothing. This makes her smile for some reason. "You were always so stubborn. Even as a baby."

And that comment hits a little too close to home for Billy, and so he does what he does best. He lashes out, he gets angry. "Like you care! Go away! And don't come back. I don't need you."

She doesn't get mad, only smiles, but it's in sadness this time. "If I knew how this was going to end when you were in California, I would never have brought you here, Billy. I never want to hurt you again. Please believe me."

He opens his eyes slowly, the memory of the dream is like a lingering kiss as he takes in the features of Steve lying next to him. He looks so peaceful as he breathes in and out in deep slumber. It's still pitch black which means it's somewhere in the late hours of the night, now very early hours of the morning if you look at it from that perspective. He's confirmed of this when he turns over and sees, '3:43am' in bright digits on the clock. The brightness of it digs into his eyes and he quickly turns away, back to Steve. He smiles softly and leans down to kiss him on the forehead. Steve doesn't show any physical sign of noticing which is good, Billy doesn't want to wake him which is why he's very careful when he gets out of the bed.

Once that's done he throws on a shirt and makes his way out the front door. He leans against the house and takes out a cigarette from his jeans pocket. He takes his lighter and flickers it into the dark night against the cigarette end. Once it's lighted he takes a large drag and breathes it out slowly. It's chilly tonight, a cool breeze passes by and it feels nice on his hot skin. Billy remembers the dream, of course he does, but he remembers every detail so vividly like it really happened. More importantly, he remembers his mom's last words like they're whispering in his ear right now, like the wind passing by.

'Please believe me.'

43. "This Feels Right And I'm Letting It."

"Fuck, I hate Calculus." Billy says angrily as he slams the textbook onto the table.

"Should have taken Trig." Steve responds with a sympathetic smile.

"And you should learn to shut."

"Hey! I'm just trying to help."

"You're not." Billy says bluntly as he goes for another cigarette. He tries not to smoke too much in Steve's house, because despite what says he does have a history of asthma. Something that should not mix with smoke and even if he doesn't have that, well Billy doesn't want to risk it, but when it comes to stressful situations like this one... Fuck, he can't help it. His diploma depends on this one test and if he doesn't get this shit done right he's going to fail it. Goodbye graduating, not that he really wants to but he and Steve made a bet. Fuck it if he's going to lose to him.

"Sorry." Steve says in a tone that says he's anything but. "Guess I'll just win the bet and I'll take the prize sooner rather than later."

"Fuck you." Despite his harsh words Billy grabs the textbook and starts on the problem again. Steve watches this from the corner of his eye, smiling happily at what he's doing. This whole bet business wasn't for his benefit, he could get the prize other ways. He's always been good at convincing Billy to do things in bed but he needs Billy to graduate. For himself. So he has options, even if he doesn't think so he can have them. He does have them.

Before either of them can really get back into the groove of studying though there's a loud knock at the door. It startles them both as they look up, neither of them expecting anyone to be here. Steve might have thought that it could possibly his dad despite the fact that he always calls first but graduation isn't for over a week his father could never take off that much time from work. It's a little disappointing to think about but it's the truth. Billy on the other hand has his own ideas of who it is when he hears that knock at the door and his heart

sinks into his stomach because of those ideas.

"I'll get it." Billy quickly says as that nagging fear of his dad being on the other side becomes too overwhelming to ignore.

"Wait—" Steve tries to say but Billy's already at the door, opening it to reveal a smug Dustin and annoyed Max.

"I knew it!" Dustin yells, his finger pointing at Billy as he walks into the house without being invited in. Max is hot on his heels as Billy looks at them surprised. He was not expecting them to turn up here on a Saturday. Of course he knows how attached Steve is to the kids and vice versa but Steve said they had some kind of huge sleepover planned for the whole weekend. A dungeons and dragons thing. They invited Steve but he has to study, so do the other elder teenagers due to final examinations later this week.

"Shit." Steve whispers to himself, then more loudly, directed at the kids, "Dammit, Dustin, what are you doing here?"

"Me!? You're best friend, your pal, who's always invited here. Mi casa sudio casao whatever. Look, Steve what is *he* doing here? That is the real question."

"Yeah, what are you doing here?" Maxine chips in, confused. "Mom and Neil said you left. They never mentioned Steve."

"Yeah, because they don't know and it better fucking stay that way, Maxine." He says it threateningly as he steps closer to her, to close for her as she takes a step back.

"Alright! Alright! That's enough." Steve steps in between them both before Max can have her say. "Dustin and Max, did you need something?"

"Um, did I need something? Yeah, Uh, buddy let me think here... Right! What the hell is he doing here!? Remember when he beat you up? And then he did it again!? Look it hasn't even healed yet!" Dustin's voice is outraged as he says it all to Steve.

"Look, he's here because he needed a place to stay."

"Yeah and you better keep your mouth shut, you little shits." Billy cuts in, earning a glare from Steve.

"Let me handle this." Steve says and Billy actually listens, something that's sort of shocking to the kids as they watch the exchange.

"Whatever."

"Alright, both of you need to go home and we need to study, but Max you can't tell your parents about this. If they knew- Well just don't okay? I'll get you a huge bag of quarters for the arcade if you don't. You too, Dustin. Please."

Max perks up at this but Dustin doesn't seem too convinced. "Steve, buddy, he's pure evil."

"He's not evil Dustin." Steve says at the same time that Max shoves Dustin with her arm for him to shut up and take the bribe.

"Fine! Fine! If you want to risk death by him, that's your choice. We'll leave! We're leaving!" He throws his hands up as he says it. He and Max then make their way out the door, but before Steve can shut it behind him Dustin turns around. He sounds serious as he says, "But this isn't over. We'll talk later."

He looks to Billy at that last part, insinuating that they will talk when they're alone. Steve simply rolls his eyes at that and shuts the door.

"I need a beer." Is the first thing that Billy says when they're finally alone again.

"Look, I'm sorry." Steve tells him sincerely and little anxiously as he awaits for Billy to explode. Something he has learned to look out for, but to his surprise Billy doesn't. He simply cracks off the lid to the beer and starts drinking.

"There's no need." Billy tells him as he takes a long sip. "They're kids. Stupid little shit kids. Always getting in the way."

"Oooookkaayyy."

“What?”

“Nothing just, thought you’d get mad. Maybe break up with me or something.” Steve says offhandedly as he turns away from Billy, playing with the salt shaker to keep his hands busy.

“What? You think I’m some drama Queen? Break up when it gets hard? Max loves that arcade she won’t say anything and she’ll make sure Henderson doesn’t either.” Billy explains, but when Steve doesn’t turn around he sets his beer down and walks closer to him. He firmly turns him around so that they’re facing each other. He raises his eyebrow to Steve and says, “This feels right and I’m letting it. I’m sorry for all the shit I put you through before, alright? I did have but reason... But we’re good now though, right? Now can we stop talking like this before I hit menopause?”

Steve smirks, then doing as he requests doesn’t say anything, he simply brings him closer into a heated kiss. Things escalate from there and the homework is quickly forgotten. For now anyway.

44. "I Will Not Tire Of You."

"Well?" Nancy asks anxiously as Steve walks over to her and Jonathan in the parking lot.

"I passed!" Steve says excitedly as he smiles widely. Both Nancy and Jonathan can't help but match his as they exclaim happily that so did they. They have good enough grades to get into college even, something that Nancy is defiantly going to do whereas Jonathan hasn't decided yet. He sent in an application to a few different schools, ones that Nancy applied to too and he got into some, but whether he firmly decides to go or not is still up in the air. He might drop out of the courses he's signed up for at the beginning of the year, mostly art classes as he wants to become a photographer but he doesn't know. Nancy really wants to go to a college with him but she understands it's his choice and hasn't been pushing too hard. Something that Steve can appreciate from afar as he knows how she likes to get her way.

"This is so exciting." Nancy says happily. "College is just around the corner, for me anyway, I don't know what you boys are going to decide yet but it would be so much fun if we could all go to the same college. I would help you study."

"Alright, alright." Steve says rolling his eyes. "I don't know about Jonathan but I'm thinking about it. I have to get home though, I'll catch you guys later."

"See you, Steve." Jonathan says as Nancy has a peculiar look on her face at his words of farewell.

"Wait, Steve!" Nancy calls, making him stop and turn to her. "Graduation is in a few days and then there's the grad party. Are you hosting it? Andrew wanted me to ask because Holly was going to do it up her parents are in fact coming back. We only have until tomorrow to figure it out."

"Crap." Steve says, disappointed in hearing that it won't be at Holly's. She's always thrown the best end of year parties, always on the last day of school but not this year it seems. Her parents actually give a

shit, something that Steve can't relate to as he remembers the phone call from his dad yesterday. He apologized profusely but he has a meeting that day. He's sending some money for him of course, a lot of money actually, a couple hundred to make up for it. "Right, yeah I guess I can."

"Great! Andrew will phone you tonight then to set everything up, or else he'll find you in class tomorrow."

"Cool. Okay, see you!"

With that Steve turns around and walks to his car, anxious to get back home where Billy probably already is as his car is no longer in the lot. All of the test scores came out today after that impossible weekend where every senior was waiting around anxiously for the following Monday to come. It was bad enough all of the studying until that Friday but the wait to know if you passed or failed was something nobody wants to ever go through again, but those going to college will have to. They always say it's worse there, more on the line than high school. Not that Steve really cares right now, he hasn't even decided if he'll go, although he did get into the one in the city but that decision will have to wait. It's not just himself he thinks about now, it's Billy too, which is why he wants to get home as soon as possible to find out if he passed or not, how good his grades are.

"Billy!" Steve yells as soon as he walks into the door. It's a little surprising when he doesn't answer back but Steve soon finds him as he turns the corner in the kitchen. He finds the teenager sitting at the kitchen table drinking a beer with an empty one next to the one in his hand. He can't have been home long so he must have chugged down the first and now he's onto a second. He's drinking it slower, but not by much as it's already half gone. Steve feels immediate concern. "What's wrong?"

"Hopper called." Billy says as Steve sits next to him. He finds Billy's face sort of lost, not quite there.

"What did he say?"

"They're laying charges. He's been arrested."

"That's great news." Steve says with a smile that quickly falls as Billy doesn't return the same enthusiasm. "Isn't it?"

"I don't know." Billy responds. "If he gets out on bail..."

"He's not going to find us. Fuck, Billy, he won't. Besides doesn't he get a court order or something not to come into contact with you?"

"Yeah, but- Shit, I don't know. A social worker is supposed to come and get Max but there's been some back log."

"They're not going to let her and him-"

"No, Hopper said he would get her out of there if he gets out on bail, social worker or no social worker." Billy explains.

"Then that's good. She'll be fine, Billy. Nothing's going to happen to her." Steve tries to reassure him.

"Yeah."

"Hey, I passed by the way." It's a lame attempt to distract Billy but it works.

"Knew you would." He smiles slightly.

"What about you?"

Billy doesn't say anything at first, he simply reaches into his pocket and pulls out his report card. He places it on the table and Steve picks it up. He scans it quickly until he sees the passing grade. "You passed! Shit! I'm proud of you."

"Yeah, yeah." Billy says putting it off like it's not a big deal but he smiles when he says it and Steve knows that he's happy. He knows that he's proud of himself. Steve can't help but kiss him quickly on the cheek and he swears that Billy blushes at that. He doesn't linger though as he gets up and goes to the fridge getting out his own beer to celebrate. He takes a sip as Billy asks, "So you going off to college then?"

"Don't know yet." Steve responds. "You?"

Billy laughs. "Fuck no. Gotta find a better job unless Gabe finally offers me Alex's job. He's almost retired anyway."

"Alex? He's like ninety. I'm sure it will happen, or else you could go to the city. With me."

Billy looks up sharply, his face is unreadable. "Right... Look, Steve, you'll go to college and get tired of me. Plenty of more bitches in the sea for you. I'll be stuck here anyway."

"Hey." Steve says angrily. "I'm not going to get tired. I will not tire of you. Especially not with the sex we're having."

He blushes slightly at the last part but it makes Billy laugh and say, "True. No way you gonna find anyone as good as me."

"Damn straight." Steve says it seriously but starts laughing almost immediately, Billy joins him. "Shit sorry, bad choice of words."

After a few minutes of laughter they both settle down and Billy can't help but say, "Damn, so we're graduating Wednesday, huh? Never thought I'd see the day."

Steve smiles. "Yep. And we're having the grad party here."

"Yeah- Wait, what?"

45. "Turns Out That Nothing Is Fair."

When he lived in California he met someone, his name was Jack. He was black, which didn't matter to Billy but it seemed to matter to everyone else. Maybe even a little more than the fact that he was a guy. Billy met him when he went to the beach in June, it was the end of the eleventh grade for him and he was celebrating that he made it another year as were the other kids who went. They had a big bonfire where the smoke rose taller than all of the trees. It made shapes and digits into the darkening sky. It was warm and filled everyone else with warmth too on the cool night. Billy was actually happy, he didn't have to see his father and he had all the beer he could want. Then he saw him, Jack that is.

There were kids there of course, a group of black kids from the other side of town also having a party. It was an end of the year thing and they asked if they could join the others. Nobody seemed to care if they did, especially when they brought over the vodka they had nicked from the store a few days for this occasion. They had quite a few bottles and that made party really get started. Along with the free samples of weed they had with them. Billy wanted some like most of the other kids and approached Jack.

He was all smiles and good vibes as Billy asked, "Can I have a joint?"

"Sure. Follow me." Jack looked around when he said that and then nodded his head off to the trees away from everybody else.

"Just wanted to get me alone or what?" They were in the trees then, obscured from everyone else's view.

"I saw the way you were looking at me."

"What the fuck are you getting at?"

Jack didn't seem off put by his angry words and harsh expression. He simply smiled like he knew some secret that Billy didn't and then lit up the joint. He took a drag and then put it to Billy's lips. Billy was confused as he felt his dick twitch. He took a drag and before he could back out, leant in and kissed Jack. It was heated and long, and

even though there were others only meters away they both got more than just a kiss from each other.

The following summer was something Billy will never forget. It was freeing and right all in one. He met Jack at bars and clubs. They drove off together and headed to the beach where it was deserted and where no one would find them. Billy took some time off from the booze and spent most of his summer days higher than a kite. An orgasm or three almost every night too. They weren't serious in the way that he and Steve are now, but they were something special. As long as Billy lives he'll always remember that summer, especially what came after.

He remembers going home one day and wondering what was wrong. He had a bad feeling in his stomach all day he was at work at a garage by the highway. A simple part-time job where he mostly did the cleaning up, but when he got home the door was opened. It didn't look like anyone had broken in but it was strange. Billy knew it was his father's day off, that Susan was working and that Max was at some camp, so it had to be something to do with his father. He remembers that he walked in slowly with that thought in his mind, afraid of what he would find. Most likely his father waiting for him with some beating but when he got there he saw something much worse.

This night, graduation night reminds him of that other night almost a year ago. There was so much blood you see, it was on the steps, on the walls and yet not much on the floor. On the floor was the body, bloodied and ruined. Unlike that night in California though, he was dead. Jack, when Billy found him in his house was simply unconscious. He was rushed to a hospital where he slowly over a few months survived. Neil claimed that he tried to break in, and since he was white and Jack was black they believed it. Anyone with brains though knew that wasn't true. Here though, in Hawkins its Neil's house, and no one can argue that he tried to break in because he's supposed to be here. Isn't he?

It's all so confusing, the flashbacks from California and what is right in front of him. He's not sure where the reality meets the imaginary. Did he find Neil like this? Did he hurt him? His hand aches, so maybe he did, but then again, there's so much blood. Is he capable of that?

Could he have done this? Where's Max? Susan? He doesn't remember. His head hurts.

"Oh my God, Billy." That's a voice he knows. A voice he recognizes almost immediately as he turns around and faces the horrified look on Steve's. "What did you do?"

Billy looks from Neil, to his cuts and scrapes. He looks from his bruises to his arm that bends the wrong way to his own that has blood running down it. His stomach hurts, it's probably his ribs again. His father's hurt him so many times there that it's not so surprising. What is surprising though is the blood that runs down from his forehead. It's fresh, the wound, and it hurts. When he found Jack, his father was there ready for him and later on he blamed Billy's injuries on Jack. That's when Jack's family came for a visit and ran them out of town. Neil was too afraid to face them. Too much of a coward. Maybe that's why he came here when only Susan was around.

"Hopper! Jesus Christ." Steve's voice snaps Billy out of his scattered memories as he looks over to see an unconscious Hopper who bleeds from a wound on his arm. It looks like a gunshot. Steve looks him over, his hands unsure where to go, what to do. He looks around helpless until his eyes lock onto Billy's. "Billy, what happened?"

Billy looks at Steve, his mind a mess, then looks away. His eyes are on Neil's closed ones. He's dead. Billy's sure of it, like maybe he was the one who made sure of it. This wasn't supposed to happen. Neil was supposed to go to prison and serve his time for what he's done, to Billy, to Jack. He's caused so much pain but instead he's dead. He doesn't have to face anything.

"Billy!?" Steve asks, his voice a little hysterical.

Billy can't find the right words, all he can think about is how unfair it is. How he'll be the one going to prison now for this. "Turns out that nothing is fair." He decides to say and Steve doesn't know what to say to that. All he can do is turn back to Hopper and try desperately to stop the bleeding.

"Jesus- Jesus Christ. Fucking hell, Billy! I don't think he's breathing.

God, shit, fuck. Call an ambulance!”

Billy doesn’t move.

“Fuck, Billy! Call an ambulance!”

He can’t move.

“Billy!”

His eyes close without consciously deciding to and his mind grows still at last.

“BILLY!”

Notes for the Chapter:

Holy crap, we are on Chapter 45 which is half way through this story. Now this chapter is a little scattered because it's from Billy's POV and his brain is a little scattered. Next chapters will be more clear, especially about what happened. Although I might take a little break from this story for awhile since we are half way through and this is kind of like the end to a part one in many ways. So until next time... :) And thank you to everyone for your comments and support for this story. I don't think I would have gotten this far without you. <3

46. "You Can Leave Me If You Wish, But I'm Not Going Anywhere."

"Thanks, Nancy." Steve says as he takes the offered cup of coffee. He blows on it to cool it down and then takes a small sip. It's too hot to chug down which is what he'd rather do, he's exhausted he needs all the coffee he can get. He has slept of course, a few minutes here and there on the chair provided for patient's loved ones. He hasn't been in a proper bed for the past few days as he refuses to leave Billy's side. He spends all his time at the hospital, staring at him, waiting, wondering, and mostly terrified.

"It's me, actually." Steve looks up to Jonathan, startled as he speaks. Jonathan notices and explains, "Nancy's with the kids. We've been taking turns being here, remember? She was here yesterday."

Steve can tell he's concerned for him, worried that maybe he has brain damage or something but it wasn't him that got hurt. If anything he's just tired. "Right, I know, I just forgot for a second."

Jonathan nods his head accepting the answer for now and sits down in another chair next to Steve's, next to the hospital bed where Billy lays. He has a tube down his throat to help him breathe, his lung collapsed and since then the other has had fluid in it. A side effect from the tubes and machine that are keeping him alive. It's more complex and complicated than either teenagers can comprehend right now but it's more than obvious to anyone how serious it is. Aside from that he has a few broken ribs, his hand is broken in three places, his shoulder was dislocated, and his nose broken. There are few scrapes on his hands where he tried to stop his fall along with some on his leg. There's bruises everywhere of course, some older ones too but many fresh new ones. Most concerning though, besides his lungs of course is the head injury. He has a massive cut that took twelve stitches to close on the back of his head. Another on his forehead but that one wasn't very serious, it only took four, but the fall caused a brain bleed inside too. It's gone down but he hasn't woken up yet. It's been four days and even though the doctor won't say so, Steve knows that it's looking grimmer and grimmer.

“Okay. I brought you a change of clothes and a tooth brush. My mom made some soup so I brought that, unless the hospital foods doing it for you.” It’s meant to make Steve smile and say something witty back but he doesn’t. He hardly even acknowledges Jonathan’s words, only nodding once. “Nancy’s really worried.”

“Me too.” Steve says automatically.

“No, she’s- I mean she’s worried about Billy but she’s also worried about you. Me too.”

“I’m fine.”

Never one to push things Jonathan simply nods and says, “Okay. I have to go to the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”

Steve’s left alone then and that’s how he likes it best. He knows that everyone is only trying to help but it only feels like they’re making everything worse. Every time someone else comes into this room he feels suffocated, he feels like he can’t breathe. He just wants them to go, to take their pitying looks somewhere else. He can’t handle it. All he can focus on right now is Billy. Watching his chest rise and fall. That’s all he can worry about, anything else, other people and the outside world- It’s too much right now. He doesn’t want to hear it. He doesn’t want to see it.

“Met Jonathan in the hallway.” It’s Hopper this time. He walks into the room quietly and takes Jonathan’s seat that was vacant from when he left.

“Yeah.” Steve says but he looks to Hopper as he says it. He tries to make an effort with him because he knows that Billy would be dead if it wasn’t for this man. He understands now how serious Billy was about that bit about his father. He would have died, he still might. “How’s your arm?”

Hopper looks down at the wrapped up appendage in its sling and says, “Fine. Still sore but better.”

Somewhere in the struggle Neil got Hopper’s gone and fired. That’s when Billy got there. Hopper tackled Neil as he bled until Billy could

wrestle the gun away. It got lost somewhere no one could find it, but all were concerned with the damage it could do. They later found it under the couch of all places but at the time they were all in a panic for different motives behind finding it. Hopper was losing so much blood then that he nearly passed out. Neil took Billy, dragging him to the stairs and then he threw him down them. He tried to lock the basement door behind him but Hopper regained some strength and pushed him over. By some miracle Billy never lost consciousness after the fall even though his lung was fucked and so were many other things. He managed to get back up the stairs and take Neil down. He punched him until his hand broke. Hopper wasn't awake to see that part, but it was obvious to anyone who came across the scene, after.

"Well, what's the verdict? You arresting him for murder?" Steve asks unable to contain the anger that lashes out of his words as he speaks them.

"No. Neil Hargrove fell down the stairs to his death. If anyone goes looking for more that's what they'll find." Hopper explains as he watches Billy's blackened and purple face.

"And Billy?" Steve asks more shocked than anything that Hopper would do this, cover it up.

"He tried to help him of course but tripped on that damn loose floor board."

"What about you? You got shot."

"Accidental discharge. Happens to the best of us." Hopper explains it so honestly that if Steve didn't know how it really happened, he would believe him, even if it is the craziest story he's ever heard.

"Thanks." Steve says after a few minutes have passed for him to digest this information.

Hopper doesn't saying, he only nods his head and puts his hand on Steve's shoulder. He squeezes once then gets up and leaves.

"Did you hear that?" Steve says once he's gone. He says it as he leans in closer to Billy. "You're going to be fine. So, you can wake up now."

Okay? You can wake up now.”

The machine continues to pump oxygen into his body and Steve can't help the tears now.

“Listen, Billy... You can leave me if you wish, but I'm not going anywhere. So please, wake up. I love you, okay? I fucking love you and I can't lose you. We can't lose you. Please.” Steve inhales, taking a shaky breath as he makes one finally plea. “Please Billy, wake up.”

47. "I Am A Fragile One."

"Hey." Steve says as he looks up to see Max walk in. It's the fifth day since Billy has been unconscious and each time someone else walks in he fears the worst. That it's the doctor coming in to tell him there's no hope, that by now he'll never wake up. The doctor hasn't said those words specifically but Steve knows that after so long it's not a good thing. Hell, he's still relying on machines to breathe for him. He has to wake up soon, doesn't he? If he's going to survive this, he has to, and he will. Billy is the strongest person Steve's ever known and if anyone can come out of this it's him.

"Hey, Steve." Max says as she walks in and sits down in the chair next to him. Steve looks to her and sees that the bruise has become less angry. It's no long so vividly purple and black, but fading into something lighter. It's a relief really because he knows that she's going to be okay but at the same time he knows that Billy would prefer it if she didn't have the marks to show what happened. Unlike him. Steve knows Billy only went over there for Max, to protect her and he did. He got her out of there and dealt with his dad, because of that Max only got hit a couple of times. The first and hopefully last time that will ever happen. "How's he doing?"

"The same pretty much." Steve tells her, then to fill the silence, "How'd you get here?"

"Mom drove me on her lunch break. She's still feeling pretty guilty for leaving me alone in the house."

"She said that?"

"No, but I can tell. She still won't really talk about it." Max explains and Steve's not really surprised. Susan must have been turning a blind eye to Neil's violent ways, it's not like that would change after death. Still, he can't help but wonder if Neil was still alive, would she have left him? Would she put her daughter first? The easy answer should be yes but Steve has that gut feeling for it to be the other way around.

"Right. Listen, Max, if you want to talk about it you can talk to me.

Or Joyce or Hopper. They might be better at this whole thing than me..." Steve trails off.

"No, no I'm fine." There's that stubbornness again, that stubbornness that always annoyed the shit out of Billy. "I just- why didn't he tell me?"

"He couldn't, Max." Steve says softly, his eyes to the ground. "Hell, it took the better part of a year to admit it to me."

"Yeah, I guess." She says it still a little confused but Steve's not sure what else he can say to her to explain it so it makes sense. After a few minutes though Max sits a little taller and confesses, "I'm glad he's dead. Neil. He was a shit stepdad anyway."

Steve knows that's not true. He knows how much Neil doted on her, giving her gifts and taking care of her. He saw it when he drove her and the others places, and he heard them talk about it. 'Neil's getting me a bike.' Or, 'Neil gave me this new bookbag.' Things like that. It was almost like he puts all the love he was capable of into this girl he barely knew and left all the hate behind in the son he's raised since birth. It doesn't really make sense to Steve, Max is okay but she's anything but a perfect child. Questions like that though are never going to be answered, especially not with Neil Hargrove dead in the ground. Well, not in the ground yet but he's going to be buried on Thursday and that can't come any sooner.

Susan won't admit to how Neil has been, what he was; which was a monster to put it into simple terms, but she also hasn't been mean. Mean is the only word Steve can think of to describe how she's not been. More than anything she's been neutral from what he can tell. She hasn't made any trouble with the final report on her husband's death and her stepson's injuries, but she also hasn't expressed any regret. She hasn't come to see Billy, nor has she asked after him from what Steve can gather. When it comes to her husband she's decided not to have any funeral, a simple burial with a priest. Neil didn't really have any family that he kept in contact with anyway.

"Nancy said you haven't left the hospital yet." Max says as she looks at Steve with an unreadable expression on her face.

“No, I haven’t.” Steve says, his eyes on Billy’s unconscious form.

“Why not?”

It’s an innocent enough question but also a very loaded one. He knows that Billy doesn’t want anyone to know about them, but after this Steve’s sure that Hopper and Joyce have figured it out at the very least. The kids though, from Max’s question and their obvious ignorance don’t know anything. Steve doesn’t care if they know, because he knows they won’t cause trouble or probably care all that much but Billy would care. He wouldn’t want anyone to know period, but at the same time Steve’s been at his bedside for nearly a week and what does that say about them? It takes Steve a few long moments before he can formulate an answer. “I am a fragile one. I don’t have many friends but Billy’s been there for me. After my mom too... I want to return the favour. Anyway, I don’t want him to think that he’s alone. That no one’s here for him.”

“He’s not. I know he’s an asshole but he’s family and everyone’s been worried. Well, Dustin, Lucas, Will, and Mike don’t really care much, but everyone else is. Besides he hasn’t been that bad lately.”

A ghost of a smile appears on Steve’s lips. “Yeah. He’s been okay.”

“You’re a good friend, Steve.”

Steve smiles at that, but it’s strained as he says, “Yeah, a good friend.”

48. "Please Do Not Break My Heart, I Think It's Had Enough Pain To Last The Rest Of My Life."

Notes for the Chapter:

Well... This took me longer than I expected to update again, but I am still writing this story, so no worries, there will be no abandoning of this work anytime soon! :3

Billy wishes that while he was unconscious- sleeping, a coma, whatever you want to call it; he wishes that he had some dreams. That he some life altering vision, or more accurately, revelation but he didn't. All he saw was nothing. There's these blurry images when he tries to think about it. Like he was in a fuzzy pillow or blanket with cotton balls in his ears. He had no sense of self or others but there was a faint awareness every now and again. He thinks he remembers hands touch his, holding his own hand. He thinks he remembers a stroke along his forehead, a tender moment of love from somebody but he can't be sure. He wants to think that someone was talking, and he's sure that they were when he wakes to that voice but being in the state that he was- or is, is not something that can make him sure of anything.

It's the words from *his* voice that break him into consciousness. "Please do not break my heart, Billy, I think it's had enough pain to last the rest of my life." Those are the words he says to him that wakes him, which lets him know he's still here. That he's still alive. He doesn't realize this all consciously at first, more like it's in the back of his head as his first feeling or thought- more of a feeling than anything is that he's not where he's supposed to be. He thinks, and even though he doesn't remember at first, not really, he feels as though they sent him away. That he's in some hospital far off in the country under lock and key for what he's done. A deed that he can barely grasp in this state. He feels scared too but there's also the grim acceptance until he feels that familiar weight in his palm, squeezing gently.

"Billy?" The voice sounds surprised and hopeful but not really, like

he's trying to tone down his excitement. Not wanting to get his hopes up. Billy doesn't realize this, all he can comprehend is the blurry vision of Steve Harrington at his bedside. He can't really move, it's like his body is weighed but he doesn't really realize that either. He thinks maybe he moves his hands but he's not sure. Maybe it's the looks in his eyes but Steve immediately has a hand on his cheek and another squeezing his own hand more urgently. He says many things but Billy doesn't really understand them. If he has to guess he would say, "It's alright, It's okay. I'm here, you're okay."

He's not able to stay long with Steve as his vision becomes blurrier and blurrier until his eyes are drifting closed. He doesn't understand this but when he opens them again everything is clearer. This time it's not just Steve but another form, another face that's writing something down in his lap. Billy's not sure what it is, not being able to fully comprehend what's going on, but when he sees the face he could probably guess what it is. It's Hopper, he's sure of it. Must be the crossword then. He wonders where Steve is, becomes even a little panicky as he does but then Hopper's hands are on his shoulders and he's telling him to calm down. Billy tries and it's only when he sees Steve in the corner of the room curled up in a chair that he does.

"That's right, you're okay, son." Hopper tells him as he slowly backs away, giving Billy the space that he needs. Billy wants to say something but he finds he can't. He doesn't realize it at first but then Hopper is talking again. "You can't speak, there's a tube in your throat to help you breathe."

Billy stops trying and simply lays still, confused. He tries to remember but all he can see are the fuzzy images of his father. There's blood, a fall, his hand- it hurts. He sees Maxine, hurt. She's cradling her face and he feels angry, but that's it. That's all he can remember, all he can see. He wants to know though, to remember but he can't. His head hurts and his eyes scrunch up in pain as he tries again. Hopper sees this and says quickly before he can do any real damage to his fractured psyche, "Relax, it's okay. Max is with her mom and she's safe. Neil is gone, he can't hurt can of you anymore."

It's just then that Billy notices the sling attached to Hopper's left arm. What happened to him? Was he there? Billy wishes he knew or

at the very least could ask but he can't. He's stuck, frozen, and defenseless. He feels light, like a piece of paper, able to float up and disappear any second. Anyone could do anything to him and he wouldn't be able to stop them. He wants to want to get angry to act out but he can't find in himself to do that. All he can do is lay there as Hopper keeps his eyes on him, but he's not looking back, he looking to the corner where Steve is curled up. He looks so tired but he looks alive, and right now that's all Billy needs.

He doesn't realize it until he wakes up again, but he fell asleep. It seems that whatever drugs he's on, because he must be, are very strong. When he does open his eyes again it's Steve's big doe eyes looking back at him that he sees. He's drinking a coffee and talking to someone. It takes Billy a second before he recognizes the voice as one Nancy Wheeler. She has a coffee too and must have brought this one for Steve. She's probably been looking after him, Billy wishes he could show his gratitude but even if he could speak he probably wouldn't be able to do that.

"Billy." Steve whispers softly, his eyes suddenly welling up. It surprises Billy and it makes him scared. How long has been here? How long has Steve? Why would he spill tears over him? And why isn't he angry that he is? "I was so worried. It's going to be okay. You're awake, you're going to be fine."

He says it so genuinely that Billy wants to believe him but he can't, because it'll never be fine. Even without remembering exactly what happened he knows this with every fibre of his being. He knows.

49. "You Don't Have To Make Any Promises."

"Billy, I don't like this." Steve says for what seems like the fiftieth time.

"I know, you said." Billy says a little annoyed as he tries to get his pants done up. With his arm still stuck in a sling for another day and a hand that's broken, wrapped in a bulky cast, everything takes effort. Not to mention how unsteady he is on his feet after nearly two weeks hooked up to a machine that breathed for him while being stuck on his back. He's exhausted just thinking about the shirt he's going to have to try and put on. Maybe he'll skip the shirt though, it hardly seems worth the effort to take his arm out of the sling and maneuver it into a shirt when he's coming back tomorrow to get it off defiantly. At least that's the plan anyway, Steve's making it a little difficult with the way he's refusing to help, wanting Billy to stay another night just because the doctor wants to be safe. There's nothing wrong with him now, well, obviously he's still healing but nothing that they can help with now. He just needs time and rest to get better.

"Please, just stay another night. The doctor said--"

"The doctor's just covering his ass." Billy butts in. "Now can you do up my jeans already?"

Steve wants to refuse but he must see the desperation and helplessness on Billy's face because he reaches out and does just that. Before Billy can even ask he grabs his socks and reaches down to help put them on. Billy takes a grateful seat on the edge of the bed as he finishes putting his socks on then his shoes. Billy wants to feel embarrassed by it, by how useless he is but he can't seem to find it within him to do so. He supposes that after two weeks of someone else wiping his ass for him, all dignity is thrown out the window.

"Leaving us already?" They both turn to the doctor who has walked into his room with Hopper at his side.

"Yeah." Billy says before Steve can. "Like you said, all I need is to rest and heal. I can do that at home better than here."

Steve smiles slightly at his words knowing full well that by 'home' he means his place. The doctor and especially Hopper don't look very pleased with this though. In fact they look a bit angry.

"Yes, well, just to be safe you should stay another night." The doctor insists.

"No." Billy says with a tightening of his muscles as he fights against this authority. Before his father he probably would have fallen in line, but after that night... "I'm eighteen, I can leave when I want."

The doctor tightens his lips, not able to disagree with that. Hopper on the other hand isn't going down without a fight. "Don't be stupid, if the Doc says you should stay then you're staying."

"Fuck no." Billy says angrily, the first bit of real emotion Steve's seen him have since he's woken up. Hopper seems to have noticed this too as he's stunned into silence long enough for Billy to shakily get to his feet and walk out of the room. Steve gives Hopper a 'what can you do?' look before following Billy out the door with his shirt in hand. Billy still hadn't put it on and wasn't going to. When he finds Billy in the hallway though he's panting with the effort of only a few steps. Steve is immediately concerned and is at his side in seconds. He holds him up as Billy pants.

"Don't." Billy says through his ragged breaths as Steve turns back to yell for the doctor. "I'm fine. Just- Just get me to the car."

Steve wants to argue but Billy's got that helpless look in his eyes again and Steve is pudding for it as he does just as he's asked. When he does get Billy situated in the car and is pulling out of the hospital parking lot he looks back to see Billy with his eyes closed, head resting against the car window. He's breathing heavy again but he looks relieved, like a small weight has been lifted, or more so like the hospital had a poisonous gas that prevented him from breathing properly and now that he's out of there he can. He can breathe again.

"I could really go for a burger right now." Billy says after a few minutes of silent driving, his voice a little hoarse from not being used to being used in the past while. It sounds more like his old self despite the croakiness and Steve can't help but let out a slightly

hysterical laugh. Billy's really here, he's okay and he's here. He's alive.

"You might have to wait awhile for that." Steve says in response. "You heard the doctor, soups and porridge only for the next couple of days."

Billy groans in response. "Fuck me."

"Maybe later." It slips out before Steve can think but it makes them both smile at the thought. It's been way too damn long.

"How are the kids?" Billy asks to fill the silence. It's so quiet, at the hospital there was always some kind of noise. He got used to it.

"Good. They're all really good. Happy to be on summer vacation." Steve bites his tongue at the little lie. It's not wrong, he tells himself, half of it's true and the other half... Well Billy doesn't need to worry about that part.

"I'll bet. I was looking forward to going to the beach." Billy says it wistfully as he looks at his casted hand. "Guess that's off."

Steve nods his head sadly. "Yeah, but we can do other stuff."

"Like what? Look at me, I'm a cripple. This shoulder won't even heal properly for another couple of months."

"We'll figure something out." Steve says persistently, then after a pause, "I'll look after you, Billy. We'll get through this."

Steve's only said that once when he was just coming around and Billy made sure for him to promise not to say anymore sappy shit like that again. He can't take it. He can't think about all that stuff. He can't think about what happened, how he got there, and where they're going to go from here. Where he is going to go from here. If he does, he's afraid he'll lose it for good and he can't do that to Steve. Not again.

"You don't have to make any promises." Billy says quieter than usual like he's scared to say it.

Steve doesn't take his eyes off the road, but his hands tighten on the steering wheel as he says with conviction, "I want to."

50. "If You Must Die, Sweetheart, Die Knowing Your Life Was My Life's Best Part."

"Fuck." Billy groans as he tries to get up and off the couch. It's the next day after he got out of the hospital and the lovely drugs they gave him there have slowly started wearing off. They did prescribe him some to take but Billy vehemently refused. He watched his mom take too many of her drugs after the car accident when he was younger to know that it's not a risk he ever wants to take. She was so out of it for months afterwards that when the doctor finally cut her off she turned to the bottle. Billy drinks but he knows how to hold his liquor, drugs though? People don't know how to stop when it comes to that shit. Not just his mom, but in California there was a lot of shit going around. The hard kind- prescribed too. He's seen some of the worst of it. Jack's cousin-

No. No. He won't go there. He can't. Not again.

"Let me fill out the prescription for you." Steve pleads worriedly as he helps Billy to his feet. "You don't have to be in pain."

"Advil's fine thanks." Billy responds as he walks over to the kitchen and to the fridge. Steve knows what he's going to grab before he even opens the door. "Besides, can't drink when you're taking that shit."

"Maybe you shouldn't be drinking at all." Steve tells him as he watches him take a sip of his newly opened beer. He debates for a second on whether he could snatch it from him and dump it before Billy could retaliate but even in his banged up condition it's unlikely he could get away with it. "Your lung collapsed, remember?"

"Yeah, I was there."

There's a strong silence that passes between them as they both get lost in their thoughts that cloud them of when it happened. For Steve he remembers the doctor and nurse crowding around Billy as machines whirled and buzzed. Billy was coughing and struggling to breathe. He looked in so much pain with the cuts and scrapes. The blood that you couldn't tell where it began and where it ended. The paramedics that rushed him in trying to offer some help since the

small town doesn't have much staff, never needing more than one doctor and a nurse- two if you're lucky. Steve watched them work from the corner of the room, helpless and scared. He couldn't move, all he could do was stare numbly and wait. He remembers thinking to Billy, wanting to say, 'If you must die, sweetheart' because if he was to die there's nothing he could do. He could remember feeling that, knowing that cold hard truth. 'die knowing your life was my life's best part.' Because it was. It really was. He was never a praying man but that night he prayed a lot.

For Billy he doesn't really remember it, all his memories are still fuzzy and maybe he could remember more if he went deeper but why the hell would he want to do that? If any sort of remembrance comes upon him it's just pain. Pain and the cold terror of his father- of this being all his life will ever be. A screwed up kid who did a screwed up thing. A person who is horrible- who's weak and small. All that pain, it's like a hot edged knife piercing into him. It hurts too much to lean into it, so he shies away. He blocks out the memory and comes back to himself. To Steve. To this moment right now.

"Can we fucking do something else? Fucking anything? I'm so bored. Where are the shit head kids anyway?" Billy asks, changing the subject.

"At the Buyers." Steve answers automatically, his eyes become a little shifty and Billy's sure that when he asked at the hospital he did the same thing. The difference being that at the hospital he was too drugged up to notice. To notice that something is obviously not right.

"What the fuck, Steve?" Billy asks a little angrily.

"What?"

"Fuck! I knew you were keeping something from me! What the fuck is going on? Is it this upside down shit?"

"Maybe?" Steve says with what he hopes is an innocent face. Billy scoffs at it and takes a seat at the kitchen table, too weak to stand and have this kind of conversation; the angry confrontational kind. "Okay, fine. There's been some pets that have been going missing."

“Missing?” Billy asks, confused.

“Yeah, like twenty one in total.”

“Fuck shit.”

“Yeah.”

“So what this is some creatures from the black lagoon?” Billy asks as he thinks about that creepy fucker they met at the Wheeler’s all those months ago. He had a lot of fucking questions and Steve answered most of them all though Billy knew it was the watered down version it still seemed like too fucking much. He didn’t exactly want to or need to know any of the details. All he needs to know is how to kill them, because if there’s a fight, you bet your ass he’ll be there. Besides from what Steve told him they could use all the help they could get, and even though Steve has that bat he’s not much of a fighter. Billy is actually surprised he survived at all, although he supposes he has the Wheeler girl to thank for some of that, not that he ever would thank in actual human words to her face. “The demo-things- whatever the fuck they’re called?”

“Yeah, we think so.” Steve says as he sits at the table across from Billy.

“Why do you think it’s them?” Billy asks still a little confused.

Steve looks surprised but then a realization hits him. “I never told you about Dustin’s cat did, I?”

“Henderson has a cat?”

“Not anymore he doesn’t.”

Steve’s face is apologetic as he says it and Billy shakes his head at his expression and what it insinuates. “I can’t fucking wait to hear this story.”

51. "I Can See In Your Eyes That You Mean It."

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm going on a little trip soon and there's no wifi so hopefully I will get a few chapters written. I know I've been slow on updates lately but what can I say? It's summer. I'm on holidays. Enjoy these latest chapters!

"Here." Steve says softly as he hands Billy his bowl of soup. He holds it shakily in his hand as a frustrated scowl fills his face. He insists on eating it on the couch and that he can do it himself but it's only been a few days since he got the sling off of his arm and his hand on the other side is still broken and in a bulky cast. He's beyond sore and the tiredness from everything that's happened is still very much there. He sleeps longer than usual. Sometimes sixteen hours which Steve would be concerned about if the doctor didn't say that it was normal. His body needs to recuperate, not to mention the trauma it and he endured. The doctor told this all to Steve with Billy out of sight, knowing how angry he would get. Steve knows him better than anyone and he knows that Billy doesn't want to face this, let alone admit how badly it affects him.

"Dammit! Fuck!" Billy yells as the hot soup spills onto his hand and pants. It's burning and causes him out of reflex to drop the bowl onto the carpet. It splashes all over, staining the beige carpet. It makes Billy stand up frustrated. He kicks the bowl and winces at the strain it puts on his bruised leg.

"Billy! Billy, sweetheart, it's okay. It's okay. It's just soup." Steve says quickly as he puts his hand on Billy's shoulder trying to calm him down. "It can be cleaned up."

"I'll clean it." Billy says in response as he goes towards the kitchen but he doesn't make it far as he feels his ribs pulse painfully under his skin from the exertion. "Fuck."

Billy grabs at his stomach as he bends over in pain. He can handle it but it's like he's on fire everywhere. It wasn't this bad the first couple

of days when the drugs were still lingering in his system but now after so long there's none left and he feels it all. He feels it everywhere like he's reliving what happened with his father all over again. He can feel where his fists made contact with his skin again and again, leaving their impression over and over. He can feel where his head collided painfully with the wall then the concrete basement floor. He can feel the broken rib pushing into his lung. He can feel the other bruised ones in painful clarity. His hand breaking and his other arm popping out of its socket. There's just a throb there now but it's still there, reminding him of the first sharpness of agony. He feels it and feels it, and it sucks. No other way to describe it really.

"Billy, stop!" Steve says it angrily but Billy knows that it's more worry than anything. His hands on his shoulders push him down back into the couch gently but firmly. Billy's in too much pain to resist as he sits back down. He's breathing heavily but Steve's warm hands on his arm and thigh help to gain his breath back. Steve's big brown eyes stare into his until he's more himself again. He's still in pain but he can breathe again, and the relief in Steve's features is everything.

"Billy..." Steve says softly, gently, like he's afraid of a verbal lashing from Billy which isn't an unfounded fear but Billy's got nothing left in him right now. He doesn't have that usual fight that's always just beneath his skin. It seems to have vanished since the hospital. He hasn't felt that familiar anger, not really. Sure he gets frustrated and mad but never that fury that caused him to lash out at others. That seems to have disappeared. Billy's not sure where it went and that scares him just a little bit. Besides he knows Steve's only worried and he knows that he shouldn't give him any reason to be more so. After everything he's put him through and he's still here; he needs to do better for him. Steve deserves the fucking world, he'll do whatever he can to give it to him. He owes him. He loves him, and isn't that what love is?

"I know. Shit I know." Billy says quickly as he stares into those brown eyes. There's a moment of tense silence between them as something that needs to be said stands in-between them. Something that Billy needs to say. He takes that moment to find the words. Once he does he says them with certainty. "I didn't want this."

"Yeah, I-" Steve's voice cracks slightly. "I can see in your eyes that

you mean it.”

“I do- I fucking do. Maxine didn’t- She shouldn’t be going through this shit.”

“Neither should you.”

Billy looks up at him sharply at that but doesn’t comment on it. Instead he looks away from him at the mess and says quietly, honestly, “I don’t know what to do.” Everything is so messed up. Everything that’s happened has screwed his head up more than he can say. He can’t even think about what happened. He can’t go there. All he knows is that he didn’t want it to happen. He didn’t want this. Steve helping him, cleaning up after him, and him being completely useless. He didn’t want Steve to have to deal with the shit he does. He deserves better than him and his problems.

“I do.” Steve responds making Billy looks at him curiously as he continues in a more carefree tone, “Just let me help you for once asshole.”

Billy smirks at that as Steve smiles. There’s no way he can refuse him so Billy nods and Steve leans in for a lingering kiss. It’s more reassurance than passion but it leaves Billy feeling more okay as Steve searches for a towel to clean up. He doesn’t try to get up again as Steve cleans but he does still feel those small twinges of guilt as he watches him do so. It’s his mess. It’s his problem but Steve helps because he loves him. He loves him. Steve fucking Harrington loves him.

Billy smiles at that.

52. "All Of These Years You've Been Lonely."

"Oh Suzie-Q, baby I love you! Suzie-Q!" Steve sings to Billy as he dances back and forth on the carpet in front of him.

"Quit it." Billy says as he suppresses a smile.

They were going through some of Steve's dad's old things and his music was one of the many boxes in the spare bedroom. They decided to stay in that room until Billy recovers fully as Steve's room is upstairs and it's difficult for him to even move from the bathroom back to the couch right now. The thing is though that it's more of a storage room than a bedroom, yeah it has a bed but there's boxes everywhere. Steve knocked over a box accidentally that morning and when the vinyl fell out it opened a whole new door into his father's life that he never even knew existed. Steve was unsure of looking through the boxes some more but Billy has been bored out of his mind for the past week since he got out of the hospital and the distraction couldn't have come any sooner. It didn't take him long to talk Steve into opening the rest of them up to see what was inside.

Mostly the boxes contained music. There were tons and tons of records but a few cassettes as well. It was mostly old rock, a favorite genre between the boys and something that Steve never thought his father would listen to. "Tight suit and all business Mr. Harrington?" No way. But it turns out Steve was wrong and it kind of makes sense when he thinks about it. His mother was so much more different than him but maybe this how they connected. Maybe it was through this music. His mom loved music and maybe his dad does too. Or did, Steve's not really sure anymore. He thought maybe listening to the music would help him find some perspective and that's how they got here.

"Seriously, Steve." Billy says as Steve dances in front of him. Truth be told Billy finds it incredibly attractive and endearing but he can't even give himself a hand job right now, there's no way that they could do anything and the temptation is hell.

"Fine." Steve says pouting as he turns off the music and walks over to sit next to Billy.

“So your mom loved music?” Billy asks tentatively, trying to both change the subject and get Steve to talk some more about what’s obviously bothering him.

“Yeah. Fleetwood Mac was her favorite.”

“My- My friend Jack liked them.” Billy says slowly with his eyebrows scrunched together wondering where the hell that came from.

“Oh, yeah? Her favorite song was ‘Songbird.’” Steve doesn’t question who Jack is even though Billy’s sure he wants to. Maybe he senses his hesitance or just doesn’t care (which is totally not Steve but...) either way he releases a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

“Where are we going to put all these?” Billy asks nodding toward the boxes. They moved them all out into the living room during their search and they could put them back into the bedroom but it was crowding it in the first place. They probably will be staying there for another few weeks anyway, better to move the boxes somewhere else that’s not going to be in the way.

“Downstairs I guess. Don’t know where else to put them.”

“You can’t move all this shit yourself.”

“I moved it out here by myself. I’ll be fine moving them to the basement. I’m not some delicate flower, you know.” Steve says it with a roll of his eyes with a nonchalance that leaves Billy breathless in anxiety.

“Fuck no!” It comes out of nowhere, loud and urgent. Billy’s heart is racing as he pictures Steve going down the stairs himself. All the shit that could happen on those stairs and how weak he is right now to prevent it. “C- Call Jonathan! Or Nancy. Or someone else.”

Steve stares at him concerned at his insistence and the fear that radiates from him. He wants to confront him but he can’t find it in himself to do that to Billy. Instead he says gently, “I’ve done stuff like this all the time, Billy. I’ll be fine. I’m kind of always alone.”

“Yeah well you’re not alone now.”

"I know."

"Just- Can we worry about it tomorrow?" Billy's voice is soft, his expression a little lost. It's enough for Steve to nod in agreement as the sick feeling in the pit of Billy's stomach dissipates for the time being. In an attempt to change the subject and with the concern that unexpectedly has been filling him at the mention of Steve always being alone, Billy says, "Your dad wasn't around."

"He works a lot."

"And your mom left."

"My mom left." Steve confirms as the air between them becomes thick with grief.

"All of these years you've been lonely." Billy says quietly as he starts to see Steve in a different light. "Is that why you stuck with me?"

"What?" Steve's head snaps up. "No. No, I'm with you because I care about you, Billy. I- I love you."

"Right." Billy says a little confused and unsure. It's hard to believe that anyone cares about him let alone loves him. No one really ever has before, not even his mom. He wishes he could say 'I love you' back. He has said it but- It's hard to mean it when he doesn't even really know what love is. Is Steve the most important person in his life? Fuck yes. Would he do anything for him? Defiantly. Does he hurt when Steve hurts? Yeah. Does he love him? Does all that mean that he loves him? He's not sure. He doesn't know if he ever will be.

"Hey, look at me." Steve says and Billy does. "I love you, Billy Hargrove."

Steve's hand in his on his jaw then sliding into his hair and running through his locks. It's gentle but firm and it makes Billy's head tingle with the contact. He closes his eyes briefly as Steve very gently runs his fingers over the stitches at the back of his head. It hurts but less so than at the start. He's supposed to get the stitches out next week than it should be healed fully a week after. He can have a proper shower once that's done. For right now Steve's been washing his hair

ever so gentle. Billy won't admit it out loud but he longs for those precious minutes. He longs for all contact with Steve. His skin on his is like fire but sometimes it's nice and gentle, and Billy's never had that until he met Steve. He was scared of it before, but Steve's shown him how good it can be. How good he can have it, if he wants.

"I only want you." Billy says quietly in response. It makes Steve's hands stop their movements as Billy opens his eyes to meet Steve's. There's longing in his and Billy wishes he could do something about it but he can't. Steve seems to have the same idea though as his other hand falls to his crotch. He rubs over the bulge and Billy's embarrassingly hard in seconds. "I can't."

Steve stops his words with a gentle tug at his cock through his jeans. "I know *you* can't do anything but I'll be gentle, careful."

Billy's breathe hitches in his throat. "What about you?"

"This is for you." Steve whispers as he looks into his eyes, his hand pulling down his zipper.

"Fuck." Billy gasps as Steve leans down and pulls out his cock to the open air. Steve's mouth is everything. "Fuck, Steve."

Billy reaches for Steve's hand that's on his thigh and holds on tightly. Steve squeezes back and doesn't let go as he continues with his ministrations. He really doesn't deserve him is Billy's final thought before he succumbs to his bliss.

53. "You Are Right, I've Been Looking As Well, Babe, I'm Not Looking For You."

"I've got it. I've got it!" Billy says a little frustrated as he waves off Steve's help. He's walking toward the couch from the bedroom and like every other day Steve was helping him do it since his body isn't at its full strength yet but it's been almost two weeks since he got out of the hospital and he should be trying to do things on his own. Walking a few feet to the couch being one of the more smaller things he needs to do by himself but even this task leaves him shaky and breathing heavily as he sinks down into the couch. Steve hovered the whole way there and now he stands in front of him with worry evident in his features. Billy says quickly to make that worry go away, "I'm fine."

"Yeah, well I'll believe it when you stop breathing like that. Does your chest still hurt?" Steve asks with concern as he leans back to sit on the coffee table in front of Billy.

"A little." Billy admits reluctantly, he doesn't want to have Steve baby him anymore. He appreciates his help, really he does, but he can be a little over bearing. It's no wonder the kids call him 'dad'. It's more of a reality than a joke he's come to find. "The doctor said that's normal."

"I know, but he also said your lung could collapse again if you push yourself too much."

"I walked a few feet from the bedroom to the couch by myself, I doubt that's really considering 'pushing myself.'"

"You haven't really walked on your own since you go out." Steve continues but at the look on Billy's face he holds up his hands and says, "I'm only worried because I care."

Billy softens at those words as he does with any kind of loving gesture or expression that Steve uses. He doesn't shy away all that much anymore as he once did. He's starting to let Steve in and to let himself have Steve. Maybe it's because of what happened. Maybe it's because he faced what scared him the most and he's not scared

anymore? Whatever it is he's trying now and that's something, isn't it?

"I know." Billy says acknowledging that he does believe Steve when he says that he cares about him, that somebody really does care about him even if it's still a little bewildering to him. Even so, his skin still crawls a little in discomfort at these moments when they stretch too long. "How's Johnny boy and the girl wonder?"

It's an effective distraction and topic changer as Steve sighs and answers with, "Good, I guess. Still arguing about college."

"Johnathan still wants her to go to that fancy pants school?"

"Yeah, but Nancy wants to go to the same school as him. It's nice, but not Dartmouth nice. It's been pretty tough on them."

"Yeah." Billy says looking down. "You're still going, right?"

"To college?" Steve asks looking at him curiously. At Billy's nod he continues, "Yeah. I got accepted into the city."

"Still set on teaching some snot nosed kids?"

Steve huffs out a laugh. "What can I say? The kids love me."

'That they do,' Billy secretly thinks as he shares a smile with Steve.

"What about you?" Steve asks suddenly serious.

"I'm not book smart. Only thing I'm good at is fixing cars."

"You should apply for a job in the city." Steve says as his eyes light up. "We could share an apartment."

Billy's surprised to say the least and he has no idea how to respond but luckily the phone starts ringing just then, saving him from having to say anything. Steve doesn't seem at all rattled by it as he gets up to go and answer. Once he's out of sight Billy sags into the couch as he thinks about what Steve said. Share an apartment? Live together? Get a proper job? Fuck, Steve really has it all planned. Only just a couple of weeks ago he thought he wasn't going to live to get out of his teen

years. He always expected his dad to kill him before he got the chance.

“Billy?” Steve looks around the corner from the kitchen with a peculiar expression on his face. “It’s for you.”

There’s a question somewhere in that statement as well as confusion not that Billy can blame him. Who would be calling him here? At Steve’s? The only friends he has are- Well, he really doesn’t have anyone but Steve. It makes him all the more curious as Steve walks over and helps him towards the phone. He pulls out a kitchen chair and brings it over to him to sit on by the phone as he knows that Billy can’t stand for very long on his own. Once he does that he gives Billy another curious glance and walks into the living room, giving him some privacy even though it’s probably killing him just as it is Billy to who the hell is calling him.

Billy takes the phone off the counter and puts it to his ear very carefully. “Hello?” He asks.

“Billy?” The male voice asks. It’s all croaky and there’s a cough after he says his name but Billy would recognize that voice anywhere.

Billy approaches the hospital room with trepidation. He waited patiently for Jack’s family and friends to leave for that night so that he could make his move and come inside. He knows that if they saw him they would beat the shit out him or worse. Besides he needs to do this alone, just him and Jack with no one else around. He needs to see Jack before they leave California for good. He needs to make him understand that he didn’t mean for any of this to happen. He needs him to know that.

He knocks hesitantly on the door and a croaky voice answers, “Come in.”

He opens the door slowly and what meets his eyes makes him cringe. Jack is laid up in a hospital bed, foot in a sling, one eye closed shut and bruises everywhere. His good eye looks to Billy and there’s a flash of fear before his mask of calm is back on and he’s saying to Billy harshly, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I had to see you.” Billy answers and oh god, this is worse than he thought it would be. “We’re leaving town. Your family chased my dad out.

Threatened him and everything.”

“Good.” Jack says and it’s so sure that Billy cringes.

“I-” Billy stops himself, a lump in his throat.

“You can’t even say it can you? Fucking coward.”

“I’m not a coward!” Billy is in his face now but once he realizes what he’s doing he backs down and says quietly, “I was looking for something from you. You were doing the same.”

Jack smiles cynically. “You are right, I’ve been looking as well, babe,” There’s anger as he says that sentimental word, “I’m not looking for you.”

Billy nods his head and starts to leave, but Jack’s voice stops him cold.

“One day you’ll understand what this feels like. I’m going to fucking prison, Billy! And you did nothing! It’s a good thing I believe in karma, otherwise I’d be out of this bed, broken bones and all, making you know how this feels myself.”

“Billy is that you?”

Billy chokes back the sudden emotion that rises up in him at that voice and says as confidently as he can manage, “Yeah, Jack, it’s me.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Refer to Chapter 45 if you need a refresher into Jack's involvement with Billy. :3

54. "I'm Just As Damn Disappointed As You."

"Billy, slow down, okay? Talk to me, man. What's going on?" Steve's hands are in the air as he steps in front of Billy whose frantically piling clothes into his duffel bag. Even though he's stronger each day he's still shaky on his legs as he goes back and forth from the dresser to the bed where his bag lies. His hand is still in a cast and throbs slightly from the excessive movement but Billy ignores it, in fact he barely notices it. All he can focus on is the conversation him and Jack had. His voice, his face, it's so clear in his mind now after so long of trying to forget. It's shaken him to his very core and at his request, he can't deny him. He owes him.

"No, Steve, I gotta go." Billy says furiously as he reaches for his deodorant and comb. He throws it into the bag and zips it up. He pulls the bag over his shoulder and tries to get past Steve but Steve's hands are on his shoulders and he's not strong enough yet to get out of his grip. Steve's gentle but firm as he pushes Billy back onto the bed where he reluctantly sits down. He's too broken to refuse. Instead he puts his head in his hands and sighs in frustration.

"Hey." Steve says softly, his hands moving Billy's from his face. He holds them in his and his voice is gentle at his next words. "Sweetheart, talk to me."

Billy's face has an angry scowl like he's going to retaliate. Almost like in the early days of their relationship when any kind of move from Steve that's more than rough or just pleasure made him angry or run away. Steve would be lying if he didn't admit to himself how that scowl scares him. Not because he's scared of Billy hurting him but because he's scared of Billy hurting himself. His hands out of reflex in that moment squeeze his and that seems to bring him out of his temporary state. His face loses its scowl and he sighs. His head dropping slightly.

Steve's hand cups Billy's jaw and brings his head up so that his eyes are facing his own. He gives him a reassuring smile and it's at these loving gestures that Billy breaks. "You'll hate me." He says quietly, then with more confidence, "I'm not a good person, Steve."

“Hey, why don’t you let me decide that?” Steve asks, his eyes now worried.

Billy’s own hand finds its way on Steve’s cheek, then into his hair, running through it as a hint of a smile crosses his features. “I beat the shit out of you. I fucked up this pretty face... You’re not stupid, Harrington, you know you’ve not been the only one.”

“I know.” Steve says calmly but inside he’s freaking out. Not the only one? Yeah, he was sure that Billy had fucked around with guys and girls (even though he knows Billy’s had probably always been more into the guys than the girls), but he thought that *they* were different. Steve was sure that they were the first for each other. Has he loved before? A love more than theirs? Has there been someone better? Happier? Less clingy? Better.

“Yeah, well, his name was Jack.” Billy continues and Steve forces his self-deprecating thoughts away so that he can only focus on Billy, because Billy so obviously needs him right now. “I met him when I was in California and we had the summer.”

“Last summer?” Steve asks.

“Yeah.”

Steve can tell he doesn’t want to say whatever it is that he needs to so in reassurance he tightens his hand on his and nods his head, urging him to go on. Billy’s eyes shift before he does, as though he is trying to gain his courage. “He got hurt because of me. His pretty face got fucked up too.”

Steve inwardly leaps. He thought Billy only called him pretty. He thought he was special. Billy must have sensed something because his hand on his hair is petting it ever so slightly as he says, “You’re the prettiest by far. Me and him weren’t like us.”

Steve is relieved at that and his next concern comes barrelling to the surface. “You hit him?”

“Good as.”

It takes Steve a moment before it dawns on him. “Your dad did.”

“Yeah. Said he broke in. Jack’s black and so they believed...”

“They believed your dad over him.” Steve fills in. “And you didn’t stand up for him.”

“Yeah.” Billy’s eyes are lost somewhere and it hurts Steve to see that. He hates when Billy’s not here with him. When he goes somewhere he can’t reach but to be fair he does that a lot too. Probably more than Billy himself. “You’re disappointed.”

“No.” Steve tries to deny, but he is. He knows that Billy did some shitty things and that the person he is now isn’t the same one from a year ago but it’s hard to picture the guy in front of him doing that. Letting his boyfriend- or whatever get the shit beat out of him then sent to jail for something he didn’t do.

“Yeah you are. I’m just as damn disappointed as you. Jack he- he didn’t deserve that.”

There’s a moment of silence before Steve moves on and asks, “So that was him on the phone, then? He wants you to go back there to California to get him out of jail?”

“No, he already did six months he said. Then he got out and he’s sick now.”

“Sick? What do you mean?” Steve asks as he feels a sinking hole in his stomach begin to form. He’s sure that he already knows but he needs to know for sure.

“He’s dying Steve.” Billy looks up at him. “He has GRID.”

Steve’s hand lowers from Billy face as his other hand relaxes in Billy’s. “AIDS?”

“GRID- AIDS, it’s all the same shit. He’s gonna die and it’s all my fucking fault. I have to go see him.”

Notes for the Chapter:

When HIV first came into the public eye in the early 80's it was a terrifying time. The LBGT+ community was targeted and segregated in many ways. Little was know about HIV at the time but through the years they managed to figure it out bit by bit, but it was a truly scary time. I hope that in this chapter and the chapters to come I do it justice and if you do see any inconsistencies, or if there's something I should add, ect. Please let me know.

55. "I'm Truly Alone And I Like It."

"I don't like this." Steve says once again for the fortieth time.

"You said that." Billy responds as he rests his head against the passenger's seat. It pounds mercilessly, a side effect the doctor told him about but it was supposed to stop last week when he got his stitches out but now it's back with a vengeance. He doesn't dare tell Steve because if he knew he would turn his car around and they would be making their way back to Hawkins General. Who knows when he would be allowed to get back on the road to California where he needs to be right now? They'd want to do unnecessary tests and worry over nothing. He's had injuries before, he knows when they're really bad, and right now it's not. He'll be fine. He just needs some aspirin and a cool beer. "Any chance we can stop for a beer?"

Steve looks at him with an angry expression. "Really? You want to drink now?"

"Forget it." Billy mutters, not wanting to push Steve when getting him to even come was like pulling teeth out of a donkey.

"Have some of my water if you're really that thirsty." Steve doesn't take his eyes off of the road as he says it. Billy doesn't say anything in return he simply takes the water and turning his head so Steve can't see slips himself a couple of aspirin before taking a long drink from the bottle. Once he's done he puts the water down next to Steve then turns back to his window where he watches the trees go by.

"Is there any other Ex-boyfriends I should know about?" Steve asks out of nowhere in a bit of a snippety tone.

Billy glares at him as Steve's eyes remain on the road. "Jack wasn't my boyfriend."

Steve scoffs.

"You got a problem, Harrington?" Billy asks angrily as he sits up straighter in his seat, the aspirin dulling his headache making him more able to be himself again. He never rebutted or commented on

Steve's bitchy attitude since they left over an hour ago but now as the pain recedes he can think more clearly. He's been acting all offended since he told him about Jack after the phone call yesterday. Billy mostly ignored it thinking it was the fact that Jack had a life threatening disease and according to Steve Billy wanted to so call 'endanger his life' by going but now Billy's sure it's something else. After all they both know, (after paying more attention than most) to the news on the disease that the government medical people have already determined it can't be spread by casual contact.

"No." Steve says none too aggressively.

"You sure? Because you've been acting like a girl on her monthlies since yesterday."

Billy's words are crude and even though Steve's used to it he can't help but yell at him, "Fuck you!"

"Come on, Steve, tell me what the fuck is wrong with you already."

Steve grips the steering wheel tightly then after a pause asks, "What was he to you?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Billy asks confused.

Steve bites his lip nervously. "You said you had the summer, then you find out he's sick and your rushing over to see him."

Oh. Okay, fuck. "You're jealous."

Steve doesn't respond to that but the way his body shifts and his fingers tighten then release, then tighten again on the steering wheel Billy's suspicions are confirmed. Steve's jealous of him and Jack. That's why he's been acting like such a bitch since yesterday. Billy doesn't really understand why although he can see what might cause it, but how? He's nothing like Jack. Steve is so much more. He's never- Fuck. How can he be jealous of *Jack*?

"Look, Steve, I'm not going to pretend that we didn't fuck a lot but I never- I never loved him. Even if I did you and me- Fuck, we're more than me and him ever would be, okay? So can you stop this bitchy attitude? The only reason I'm going is because I feel fucking terrible

about what happened, okay? There! I fucking said it. I actually feel something.”

Steve looks at him surprised but also relieved. “Okay. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I guess if I were you I’d be fucking angry too.” Billy tells him truthfully as Steve focuses back on the road, but not before reaching out and taking Billy’s hand in his own. He intertwines their fingers and holds on tightly. Billy smiles at the feeling as he looks out the window again but at the thought of what he faces in California his smile falls.

“Fuck.” Jack says with a laugh. “Never fucked a guy in a lighthouse before.”

Billy laughs as he reaches for a cigarette and lights it up.

“You want anymore?” Jack holds up the whiskey bottle but Billy quickly shakes his head in answer. He’s never likes whiskey and the only reason he drank it now is because it was all the alcohol that Jack brought, and there’s no way he could have done this if he was completely sober. Now that the deed is done though, there’s no need to have any more of that shit. The smell of it brings back too many memories that he’d rather never had to have experienced in the first place.

“You coming to the party Saturday at Dekes?” Jack asks after he takes sip of the burning liquid.

“No. My dad wants me to clean his car.” Billy answers bitterly at the thought of that chore.

“What? Just ditch it.”

He says it like it’s so easy. Billy scoffs and shakes his head.

“Come one.” Jack persists. “We could go to the party together.”

He sits up and leans over Billy, wrapping his arms around him from behind. Billy shakes him off and stands quickly. He takes a few steps away from him and reaches over for his pants. He puts them on quickly as Jack sighs then lays back down. “Come on Billy, you know the crowd we hang out with don’t give a shit who fucks who. Well, most of them.”

"Yeah well I fucking do." Billy says angrily.

Jack shakes his head. "Fine. If you want to be alone, fine."

"Fuck you."

"Billy, look, I was like you. I used to say all the time to myself that I'm truly alone and I like it but that was a fucking lie. Nobody likes being alone."

"I'm not alone." Billy tells him with a sneer as he grabs his jacket and makes his way to the stairs.

"Okay!" Jack says with his hands held up. "I'm sorry. You only want someone to fuck you, I can do that."

Billy shakes his head but he's stopped trying to leave. "Whatever. Next time bring beer or fucking vodka. Anything but whiskey."

Jack laughs. "I wondered why you didn't want anymore."

"Me and Jack fucked around a lot but he was my- my fucking friend, okay? So yeah I feel fucking awful but- I don't want him to die." Billy says all this looking out the window and he's not entirely sure Steve heard him until he squeezes Billy's hand in his.

"I get it." Steve says gently. "It's like Nancy and I. I wouldn't want her to die either and if she was dying I'd be there."

Billy nods his head, still looking out the window and then very quietly he says, almost regretfully, "Last year I wouldn't have."

Steve squeezes his hand tightly and Billy hangs on for dear life.

56. "Though We're Young, I Feel Eighty Years Old."

"Hey Jack." Billy says, his voice losing its usual confidence as he takes in the sight of Jack sickly and weak laying on a bed in the middle of the apartment's living room. He looks so much different, so small and frail. His eyes still have that usual mischievous gleam but everything else is like a whisper of another time. He smiles when he catches the eye of Billy but it's a pathetic smile and it's interrupted by the enormous cough that overcomes him. His younger brother quickly runs over with a tissue and holds it up for him to cough into. He tries to take the tissue into his own hands but he's too weak for even that and they end up flopping uselessly to his side. He coughs for what seems like forever until finally it subsides and his brother takes the tissue away. He goes to throw it in the garbage but not before Steve sees the blood inside.

"You finally made it." Jack says but it's all wrong. His voice is croaky and harsh. Nothing like the smoothness it once held in his tone.

"Yeah." Billy says softly, not being able to find it in himself to make a usual snarky comment. The sight of Jack has shocked him to his very core.

"I know." Jack says sadly. "I'm a sight for sore eyes, hey?"

He's smiling and Billy tries to match it for his sake but he can't quite find the mirth Jack is trying to emanate. This situation, him in this bed is too much right then. He knew he was sick, that he was dying but it didn't really click until now. Now he sees him, he sees how sick he is and how close to death. Jack's younger brother must have sensed this because he smiles sadly at them both and tries to change the subject. He asks politely, "Did you want something to drink?"

"No thanks, Charlie." Steve says for the both of them as Billy is still staring at Jack in a shocked stupor.

"Are you sure?" Jack's younger brother, Charlie asks. "They have a great diner across the street. Maybe me and you should go, leave Jackie and Billy to catch up?"

Steve looks to Billy to see if he's okay with that but when he doesn't make any acknowledgement that Steve's even there he puts his hand on his shoulder. It shakes Billy out of his shocked state as he looks over to Steve with a questioning gaze. Steve repeats Charlie's proposal and Billy nods. Steve rubs his shoulder gently, the smallest of movements for reassurance but Jack's careful gaze catches it. He doesn't say anything though as Steve and Charlie head out of the apartment. Once they're gone though it's another story.

"Steve's your boyfriend then, huh?" Jack asks a strange look in his eye.

"Uhh- Um, look Jack-" Billy starts, clearly uncomfortable with this line of questioning. He's never had to admit it out loud before to anyone but maybe Steve. Even then it was not an explicit explanation. It was only an insinuation. He's never been faced with this situation, with this honesty.

"It's fine, Billy." Jack tells him sincerely. "I'm happy for you."

It throws Billy a little. He never thought he would hear Jack say that, not when the last time they saw each other he was giving him angry words and a promise for him to get his 'karma'. If he's being completely honest he didn't know what he was expecting when he agreed to come here, but he's sure it was defiantly not this. Not Jack saying he's happy for him and him being *nice*. It throws him for a loop, that's for sure. He's not really sure what he's supposed to say that expect the burning question he hasn't had the courage to ask yet; too shocked and surprised when they spoke on the phone and then the sight that beholds him now.

"Why did you want me here, Jack?"

"I wanted to say goodbye. Obviously." Jack says with a roll of his eyes but his charming smile is back, even though it is severely weakened by the state he's in.

"Goodbye." Billy says simply and Jack laughs.

"To the point. It was always like that with you. Come here, pull up a chair."

Billy considers it for a moment but does as he's asked. He keeps a respectful distance between him and Jack though, the ever present fear of the disease still at the back of his mind as it has been for every man in his situation the past couple of years. Even though they know that casual contact can't spread it, it's still hard to believe, to accept it after so much fear. So much pain.

Jack tries in a vain attempt to sit up but quickly settles back down with a huff of both frustration and exhaustion. "Though we're young, I feel eighty years old."

"How long do you have, Jack?" Billy asks after a few moments of Jack getting his bearings back.

"A few weeks if I'm lucky. 'Lucky.'" He says it with a laugh. "I wish that it would just kill me already. I can't take it."

"You don't deserve this."

"I know."

They catch up for the next half an hour. Billy's pretty evasive about what he says but Jack's able to get a lot out of him from months of practice. Besides he's always had a knack with people. He talks to them and they listen. It's something that Billy both admired and was drawn to. He's always been drawn to better people than himself, and from what Jack tells him that hasn't changed. He's still a better person. He was volunteering to help the gay men of California with this disease. Hospitals were reluctant to take them in. Most sending the men back home to die. People didn't want to get close to them to even help, but some volunteered to do what others wouldn't. Jack was one of them. Well, his friend got sick, then after he died he tried to help others but then he got sick too. Even his own family wouldn't come and see him. Out of his nine brothers and sisters only Charlie stayed to take care of him, to be there for him.

"Alright, let's go home." Steve says as they walk out of the apartment, his arm around Billy's, helping him down the many stairs a few hours later. He's still a little weak and his head throbs painfully, something that Steve doesn't know of course. His state didn't escape Jack, but Billy was reluctant to say anything. Jack was

surprisingly okay with that, either it was that or the fact that he was getting too tired from the short interaction to keep badgering him. In retrospect it was probably the latter, Billy concludes.

“Wait.” Billy says, stopping Steve at the bottom of the stairs. “I’m going to stay longer. I can get the bus back in a few days.”

“No.” Steve says forcefully, making Billy step back. “No, no I mean, you’re not going to take the bus back to Hawkins. If you want to stay we can stay.”

“Why would *you* stay?” Billy asks, confused.

“Because I love you dumbass.”

Billy smiles. “Fuck you.”

Steve matches his smile and pulls him in for quick kiss before their arms find themselves around each other. They pull the other close as Billy loses his own smile. Almost simultaneously so does Steve.

“I hate-” Billy whispers, stopping, not being able to finish his words.

“I know.” Steve’s whispers in response as his arms tighten around him. “I know, sweetheart.”

57. "Your Arms Around Me Are Keeping Me Warm, But Baby, I'm Still Feeling Cold."

"You ready to go over?" Billy asks Steve as he towels off his hair. Steve stands across from him with a strange expression on his face, almost as though he's struggling with something. Once Billy realizes this perplexing face he stops short of his questioning and instead says almost humanly, "You don't have to go, if you don't want to."

They've been in California for almost three days now and each one has been hard on not just Billy but Steve too. Watching someone, and being there for them as they struggle through their last moments is a tense and exhausting ordeal. Even if you aren't doing much but being a good ear for them, or even if you're simply giving their hand something human, something real to grip. To remind them that they're still here even if it is only for a little longer. To watch them lose a new function we take for granted every day is almost impossible. Billy feels awful because he cares, something he hates, but Steve feels awful for other reasons. Billy, in all the information he knows concludes this to be his mother who fought a similar battle, (although vastly different in disease) and lost, just as Jack will.

"What? 'Course I'm going. I just need to find my jacket." Steve reassures but it's all wrong. First of all it's summer in California and Steve had already complained about the heat numerous times since they got here. He hasn't worn a jacket since so why does he need one now? Second of all it's right in front of him on the crappy motel bed. Steve wanted something nicer but he was already paying for this stay, courtesy of his dad's money and Billy didn't want to feel like he owed more than he already does to Steve. Not to mention how much of a fucking loser he is for not being able to- to *give*. Steve said it was fine that his dad won't care nor notice, but Billy does. He does a whole fucking lot, but it's not about him right now. It's about Jack, so he's pushed down this shit and is trying to forget his inadequacies in regard to being the right person for Steve for now.

"Right." Billy settles on saying, his voice so obviously not convinced but Steve doesn't even seem to notice it as he searches for his jacket. He finds it easily enough as it's straight in front of him and in no time

he's telling Billy to hurry up as he walks to his car. Billy's not really sure what he should do in this situation so he simply puts the towel down, finds his shirt, and follows him. Never mind the fact that Steve didn't even wait to make sure he is okay to walk on his own.

"He's not doing so good." Charlie says sadly as he opens the door to the two young men. His eyes are red and blotchy. It's obvious that he's been crying and crying a lot, but there's a strong acceptance that surrounds him that makes him stand up just a little bit taller than the few days before where he seemed sort of lost. He doesn't look lost now. He knows what's coming. He knows it's almost time, and without having to say anything to Steve or Billy they know it too. It's one of those primitive things that seems to rise in situations where you most and least expect it. Death is near. And they can all feel it. Most of all Jack, Billy's sure.

"I'm- I'm sorry, Charlie." Steve says for the both of them. He seems a little choked up but Billy knows that he'll be fine. He hardly knows Jack and whatever's going on, which he's sure has to do with his mom, they'll figure it out together but not right now. Right now it's about Jack and maybe he needs to see Billy as much as Billy needs to see him right now.

"Thanks." Charlie says quietly. "He's been asking for you."

He says it to Billy who nods his head solemnly yet determined. It's then that Charlie makes the suggestion that he and Steve head should into the small kitchen for some coffee. His way of giving Billy and Jack some privacy without having to completely leave his big brother's side. Steve agrees but it's a little hesitant as he holds a lingering glance with Billy. Him and Charlie disappear into the kitchen as Billy closes the front door firmly and makes his way around the corner where Jack lays in his bed in the middle of the living room. Although now it's less of a living room and more like a patient's hospital room. He's breathing quiet heavily and he can barely open his eyes, let alone sit up anymore even if he did have help. He seems so much worse in such a short time that it causes Billy to stop dead suddenly afraid. He can't help but stare.

"Hey." It's all croaking and there's what seems like a never ending cough afterwards. "B- Billy."

“B- Billy.” Neil coughs and blood pours out of his mouth as Billy holds him up by his shirt. His hand throbs painfully, but he does pause at his father saying his name. He wants to hear what he has to say, some small part of him wanting him to say that he’s sorry and that it will never happen again. Some small crumb that tells Billy he doesn’t have to do this. But what comes out is something that he knew was coming. “Y- You w-were never m-my son.”

Billy pulls his hand back and comes down hard. He feels the life leave him and sees the uselessness of the body in his hands but he keeps hitting. He can’t seem to stop. Even when the blood runs thick for him.

“Billy.” It echoes.

“I’m here, Jack.” Billy tells him as he steps closer to the man who was once a lover but has always been a friend.

It seems like Jack smiles. Billy stays standing over him for some time as Jack gathers the last of his energy to at last say, “Turn th- the tunes up and d- dig it.”

It sounds strange in his old croaky voice now but oh so familiar as Jack always used to say that when they found themselves with music close by. He hasn’t heard it in so long but Billy laughs and complies. He turns to the record player nearby and puts whatever records in there on. The music fills the apartment. A song that Billy recognizes, a song that Jack has always loved.

“H- Hold me. One l- last time? I’d a-sk to da-” Jack tries to finish but a vicious cough stops him. It’s no matter though, because he doesn’t have to finish. Billy’s already laying down over the covers, not caring about the fearfulness of the disease and instead giving what comfort he can. He brings Jack close and Jack hangs on. They stay like that for a while, the record replaying itself before Jack says his final words, “Your arms around me are keeping me warm, but baby, I’m still feeling cold.”

Those last words are hollow but surprisingly clear and they tell Billy so much more. Jack loved him and he never stopped. Billy can’t ever feel what he no doubt can now understand that Jack feels for him but he can let him know that he is loved. Even if it’s not in the way that

he wants. He does as much by holding him in a more loving embrace than he thought possible. Steve is in the back of his mind like he always is as he does this, but he knows that Steve will understand. Jack's head rests on his chest and Billy feels every breath, especially the last so clearly as he gently touches his head and cheek. Later, when Charlie and Steve return, Billy and Steve's eyes lock and there is an understanding between them far greater than any word can express.

All through this the song plays on, and Jack would have wanted that more than anything.

'I wanna do everything...

What a beautiful feeling...

Crimson and clover...'

"Turn the tunes up and dig it."

58. "You're Kind And You're Beautiful, Too."

"Are you sure about this?" Steve asks as he watches Billy fumble around the small motel room looking for his wallet to get his card.

"Well no shit." Billy answers clearly irritated not just by Steve's questioning but also by the fact that he can't find his damn wallet.

"Come on, I didn't mean it like that." Steve backtracks sensing the obvious frustration. "It's a lot of money and you worked hard for it."

"Steve, he deserves a proper funeral. If Neil can have one then Jack sure as shit will."

Steve leans back, realizing where some of the anger is coming from. "Of course he does, I just- Let me cover the last hundred at least."

"No." Billy finally clutches his wallet in his hands, his face turns towards Steve now as he says that forceful word. There's no way in hell he's going to let Steve cover any of the money, he's already paid for this room for so long and driven his ass everywhere even though he's pretty fucking sure he can drive now. Steve insists that he doesn't of course, making sure that he takes things easy which was a relief after the few days where he's been so distant and seemingly emotionless. "Me and Charlie will figure it out."

"Let me do this, Billy. I know I didn't know him that well but he was nice. He- Like you said he deserves a proper funeral. To be put to rest. Please." Steve's brown eyes turn more puppy doggy by the second and Billy reluctantly nods his head. He's too emotionally and psychically exhausted to really fight this and he knows Steve's good for the money. Not to mention stubborn as hell, he'll let him do this but that's it for his charity. He doesn't need anymore.

"Fine." Steve smiles at that simple word and gets up from where he sits on the edge of the motel bed and brings Billy into a hug. Billy rubs his back but Steve soon finds his hand drifting to his ass and giving a tight squeeze. Steve squeaks slightly but laughs it off as he blushes in embarrassment. "I guess I should repay you for this."

Steve smirks but very sternly says, "Not until you get your last check up, Hargrove."

Billy groans and Steve rubs his arm comfortingly. Steve doesn't show it but he's just as anxious to get back to their sex life. While the other stuff is good, sex is something they've always been great at. Plus, hey, two teenage boys here. Hormones raging and all that. Besides Steve's had to help Billy shower for the past few weeks, he's had enough shows, he needs the real thing. Him and Billy both, but then the grief sneaks its way in and the guilt of both of their thoughts at a time like this sinks in, and they lean away from each other as the mirth leaves there little bubble. The seriousness of the situation settle in their bones once again far too quickly.

"So what time are we meeting Charlie?" Steve asks to break the now painstaking silence.

"Half past one." Billy responds.

"We better go then."

"Yeah, by the way what kind of flowers do you think we should go with? White or yellow?"

A lump forms in Steve's throat. He coughs past it as best as he can before answering with, "They don't have any blue?"

"I hate red flowers they always reminded me of blood, you know?" Jack says to Steve with his familiar crooked smile.

"I guess I could see that." Steve responds but he loses his smile as he remembers his run-ins with the upside down. There was a lot of blood then, he supposes that he could understand how Jack sees that in the red flowers. "Violets are kind of nice."

"Yeah, but the best are blue. After they bury me and Billy doesn't know what flowers to bring, tell him something blue, okay?"

It startles Steve, his frankness at death and how easily he can speak of it. It's surprising and a little disturbing for him. He's faced the possibility of death with the demo-shits but never to the point where he thought about after he's buried. Or even being buried at all. It's so strange and foreign a

thought to him, but then again everyone does die; some sooner than others, like Jack.

“Is that why you told Billy to go with Charlie? So you can tell me about what flowers for Billy to put on your grave. ‘Cause that’s pretty dark man.”

Jack laughs but it quickly turns into a horrible cough. Steve helps him with a tissue after quickly putting on pair of gloves, a precautionary measure that everyone takes including his brother, Charlie. Afterwards Jack takes a few minutes to catch his breath and then says to Steve, “No. I told him to go because I wanted to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“You and Billy.”

“Oh.” Steve’s immediately awkward and a little fearful.

“Not like that.” Jack reassures. “I really am happy for you both. I’m happy for Billy. You’re kind and you’re beautiful, too. You’re good for him, more than I ever was.”

Steve doesn’t know what to say to that so he says nothing which causes Jack to smile. “And I know that you’ll do this for me. If not in kindness for me, then for Charlie and Billy.”

“Do what?” Steve asks as a bad seed starts to form in the pit of his stomach. He can sense that whatever Jack is about to ask, it’s something more than to get him a glass of water or hell even manage whatever estate he has. Instead, Steve is sure it’s something a little more life altering. When he finds out the truth of Jack’s request, he realizes how right he is. More than life altering, it’s a moral dilemma.

Jack smiles ruefully at Steve asking him what he wants but instead of answering he looks over to the dresser close by. On top lies a bottle.

And then it clicks, so suddenly and so cruelly.

“No.” Billy answers Steve as he looks through his wallet to make sure his cards inside. Once he finds it he looks up to meet Steve’s lost eyes. “You okay, Harrington?”

Steve snaps out of his stupor and looks to Billy. He smiles forcefully but Billy doesn't seem to notice as he says in way of an answer, "Let's go."

59. "I Feel In Some Way I Do Love You But Babe, I'm Not In Love With You."

Steve pours the black hot coffee carefully into the motel's shitty mugs that are stained from previous use. He doesn't really care though, he's too tired too and Billy, well, Steve's learned from early on that he's not used to nice things. To things being good, so he pours the coffee and hands him a cup. Steve didn't sleep because of Jack and Billy didn't sleep because of Jack too. It seems they both have had things altered because of this event, this loss, although neither really knows how deep it runs for the other. They can only guess at what they already know.

"You ready for this?" Steve asks nodding his head toward the suit lain out on the shitty motel bed. To be fair the suit isn't much better, a cheap thing Billy bought at a thrift store. He wouldn't allow Steve to buy a better one. In retrospect they could have driven back to Hawkins but it didn't feel right at the time instead opting for some cheap suits and to spend the sleepless nights in the motel's cheap bed.

Billy nods his head and even though Steve sees right through it, he doesn't comment. He doesn't need to. "Alright."

"Gotta finish this coffee first."

Steve smiles slightly. "Yeah."

"We're back." Charlie says casually as he and Billy walk in, bags of supplies in each hand. Mostly it's groceries but some of it is for Jack to help manage his symptoms. That's all they really can do for this disease right now; manage. That and make the victim more comfortable, as comfortable as can be.

"Sonny and Cher? Really?" Billy asks incredulously as the famous song plays from the radio.

"Steve likes it too." Is Jack's reply as Billy looks to Steve for the truth.

Steve's lost in thought when Billy's eyes land on his but then Jack is

coughing viciously, and once that's under control Steve looks like himself again. Billy's concerned as that twinge of fear that seems to come whenever something's not right with Steve kicks in, but then he's being pulled into the kitchen by Charlie to put the food away, and he remembers Jack and the situation, he can worry about Steve later. Right now he needs to worry about Jack, he and Charlie are all he has.

Once Billy and Charlie are gone Steve's left with that weight that has been put on him by Jack who looks at him hopefully but also certain. He seems to think that Steve will do this thing for him- for Charlie and Billy, but how can he? This isn't right, it's not. Jack has more time with Charlie and Billy. More time is always precious. It's something Steve's learned from his mom and he tries to tell that to Jack but he won't listen. He spent the last half an hour trying to convince him as Jack does the same to him. It's gotten them nowhere but frustration and anger.

"Please, Steve." Jack pleads. "Before they get back. All you have to do is crush them up and put them in some juice. I'll do the rest."

That wasn't entirely true and they both knew it. Jack can barely lift his arms and talking hurts. He's not strong enough to wipe his own mouth let alone hold a cup of juice and swallow it. Steve would have to hold it, put it to his lips. He would be the one to administer the poison. He would be the poisoner, not Jack. Jack just has to sit there, lay there and die. Steve's the one that will have to live with this. He'll be the one with all the shit that falls.

"Please, Steve." Jack's eyes are on fire in desperation and his tone is so convincing that Steve is wrapped in, but before he can do anything Billy's there.

"Please what?" Billy asks, and almost like they're not having a conversation over murder Jack smiles.

"I want him to change the station."

"I thought you liked this Neil Diamond asshole?"

"Not today." Jack tells him so easily that Billy doesn't even question it as he goes to change the station for him. Once he's done he turns to Steve and raises his eyebrows at the look in his eyes.

"You okay?"

"What?" Steve asks, looking over to Billy who has that worry in his eyes once again.

"I said 'you okay'?" Billy repeats.

"Yeah."

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm fucking sure." Steve snaps and the few people around them at the gravesite who actually came to Jack's funeral looks away. Steve immediately feels guilty as he remembers where he is and the service that just took place. He whispers in regret, mostly to Billy but to the others too if they're still listening, "Sorry."

Billy pulls Steve away from Jack's freshly dug grave that's now being covered up by grave diggers. His hand stays on Steve's arm as he asks, "Is this about your mom?"

Steve stops suddenly, his body grows cold in shock. His mom? "My mom?"

"Yeah, you've been weird."

Billy's noticed. Steve really thought he wouldn't but even so he agonized over what would happen if he did ask. He came up in his head with all kinds of excuses, some good ones but now here's Billy with the most obvious one of them all. One he didn't even think of on his own and one that he latches onto immediately as he nods his head. "Yeah, it's about her."

Billy nods his head like he expected this all along and in a rare public display of affection pulls him into a quick hug. It only lasts a few seconds but it's enough for Steve to feel a new wave of guilt. Here they are at Billy's best friend's funeral and he's making it out like it's all about him when Billy's the one going through hell. He feels fucking awful.

"I'm okay, Billy." Steve tells him quickly. Billy studies him for a few seconds before relenting and nodding his head in acceptance. He

looks over to the gravesite where the grave diggers are finishing up and everyone else has gone already. The service ended a while ago but since that's all there was going to be some of Jack's friends, people Billy's never heard of stayed to talk. While he and Steve were having their moment they must have all left. Charlie had left to but long before, not able to cope after the service ended, Billy wishes he could have left then too but there's something he has to do.

"I need- I..." Billy trails off, unsure of how to put it into words but Steve as usual does when he can't.

"I'll wait for you in the car." Steve tells him with a squeeze of his shoulder before walking back to exactly where he said he was going. Billy watches him go before turning back to Jack's grave where he's now the only one.

"Just you and me, Jack." Billy says softly as he walks closer to the new dirt. He hunches over it and stares where Jack's body is six feet under. He feels stupid doing this but Steve told him how he talked to his mom after she was gone and how it helped. Helped him to move on, to not forget but to put it behind him. "Jack I... I feel in some way I do love you but babe, I'm not in love with you. I never was. I'm sorry. Most of all, I'm sorry this happened to you. I'm sorry I did this to you."

Because he did. Jack told him he was forced in prison that it's the only time he never used a rubber. According to the government sex is a way to get this. They just found out. Billy thought like everyone else that he got it from helping the others who had AIDS but he didn't. He was always careful there, never got blood on his hands or other shit. The only time he wasn't safe was when he didn't have a choice, in prison, where Billy put him.

"I'm so fucking sorry, Jack."

And for the rest of his life he would be.

60. "You Seem To Look Through Me, I Wonder What You See."

Steve rests his head against the steering wheel as he takes a long and hopefully calming breath. He told Billy that he would wait in the car and so he is. He figured that Billy would need some time alone before they even came her and with his broken emotional words Steve found his suspicions to be true. Billy did need some time alone, but Steve soon found out that so does he. Billy figured out something was wrong already and it's only been a few days. He was never good at hiding his emotions but now it seems like he has to do it every second of the day, but then again maybe once they get away from here it will be easier. It has to, what else can he do?

"Fuck." Steve whispers as he tightens his grip on the steering wheel, his forehead still pressed against it. He could really go for a beer, any kind of drink, hell even some weed would do. He just needs something to get his mind away from all this shit but he has to drive. They have to get back to Hawkins today and Billy's still not one hundred percent yet. How the hell is he supposed to do this? Fuck, Jack should have left an instruction manual but then again it's not like he's ever been in this position he is currently in before.

Steve doesn't get to ponder on it long because suddenly Billy is back, opening the door and getting inside. He doesn't say anything as Steve leans back and looks at his eyes. They're a little lost but then he has a cigarette in hand and is lighting up. He takes a long drag and stares out the passenger window. He's not really supposed to be smoking not after his lungs got so fucked up but how can Steve judge him? After everything he's done, it pales in comparison to what Billy's done, or has it? After all, they've both killed people. Billy's in self-defense, and Steve in an act mercy. Or was it mercy? Was it anything at all aside from murder? Is self-defense and mercy and suicide just other words to make it not sound so vile? So real? So evil? Because it's all the same isn't it? It's all murder. The act of killing another human being? It's all murder in the end.

"You seem to look through me, I wonder what you see. But I know what you see, what you're thinking." Jack says to Steve who stares at him, like

he's looking for something, maybe a reason. To do it or to not do it, Jack's pretty sure it's both.

"Oh, yeah?" Steve asks looking at him now.

"Yeah, you're thinking you're gonna arrested or that is a crime but it's not, and you aren't."

"Wouldn't be so sure."

"Come on, Steve, I'm a queer with AIDS. Nobody gives a shit about us. One more dead, they won't care. They won't go looking for something that they'll know in their own stuck up way so self-righteously, isn't there."

Jack was right about that. Nobody really does care about the likes of them, thinking them to be disgusting blemishes on society. People who don't fit in and never will. People who get things like AIDS. Most think it's an act of God striking them down but 'normal' people get it too. It's been proven, even so, Steve knows that Jack's right. Nobody will care, nobody will go looking, but it's still wrong. To kill someone? That's something horrible, something that fucks you up. Even though he hasn't seen the entire effects it's had on Billy yet, Steve knows he'll never be the same, but Jack is in pain. He's going to die anyway. He doesn't deserve to suffer.

"You know I'm right." Jack says as he watches the thoughts go through Steve's mind. "You'll be saving me from a shit tone of pain. Billy too, and Charlie. Watching someone die isn't pretty. I figured you would understand that better than anyone."

Steve turns his head sharply to meet Jack's steady gaze. "What?"

"Billy told me about your mom, so please do it before they get back. I don't think there will be another chance."

"She was already dead before I got there." Steve responds looking down to his feet. "I can't. I can't do this man."

Steve gets up and paces back and forth in front of Jack's bed. He can't do this. It's murder, but Jack is in pain. A blind man can see how much pain he's in, then there's Billy and poor Charlie. Charlie's only fifteen and he's already dropped out a semester to take care of his brother. He'll be doing an extra year as it is if he wants to graduate. As for Billy, they've only

been here a few days and already Steve can see the toll it's taking, the pain it's causing him too. The way he doesn't sleep anymore and the way his eyes are so empty and lost. At least when Neil died, Billy lashed out somewhat, here, with Jack's situation he's just gone.

"You're as selfless as they come Mr. Steve Harrington, or, well, as much as I can tell from what Billy's said. So don't let me down, don't let him down."

It's a low blow, but it works.

"You gonna drive?" Billy asks, breaking Steve out of his thoughts. He looks over to Billy who doesn't look back at him as he smokes.

"Yeah." Steve says to the side of his face. "Home sweet home."

Steve backs out and finds himself on the highway in no time as this commentary is near the main drag. He doesn't notice, only feels the look that Billy's giving him. It's usually Billy himself making the sarcastic condescending remarks, not Steve. It must feel real different to find himself on the opposite end of this- whatever it is they have. Steve doesn't care though, everyone has a little sarcasm in them from time to time. Especially when things are so awful.

Wow, Steve's staring to understand Billy more and more each day.

He's not so sure if that's a good thing though.

61. "I Wish I Could Stay With You."

"I wish I could stay with you. With Charlie, with Billy- Hell, especially you. You've been a real pal, Steve, through all of this." Jack says and there are tears in his eyes which is both surprising and unsettling for Steve.

"I thought you wanted this?" Steve asks now confused as he holds up the drink with the lethal dose already dissolved inside.

"I do." Reassures Jack as his chest heaves with unexpressed sobs. "I want this pain to end but I don't want to die, Steve, nobody does, not really. We just want the pain to end. I don't want to leave Billy, God, I don't want to leave Charlie but its better this way. Trust me it is."

Despite the words Steve doesn't feel anymore reassured. How can he? He's about to help kill a man who has so much to live for. He's about to take the life of an innocent. He can try to reason with himself that the reasons are just but in his heart he knows the truth. He knows that this simple murder covered up in sweet little lies so that someone, someone like Jack doesn't have to deal with reality anymore. But again, Steve asks himself, how can he judge?

"You ready?" Steve asks, trying to push down the fear and uncertainty

Jack nods his head in answer and Steve nods his back as he comes closer with the glass. His hands are shaking but he doesn't let the liquid spill. The sooner he does this, the sooner it's over, the sooner they can put this behind them and spilling it will cause this to go on longer. The sooner this is over the sooner that Jack is not in pain anymore, that's the one thought that Steve tries to hang onto as he brings the cup closer and closer. It's hard for him to watch as Jack struggles to put the cup to his lips, to swallow. His tears have stopped now and he's gulping it down as Steve pushes it further and further down his throat.

And then, just like that the liquid is gone.

"Good?" Steve asks numbly. He can't feel anything anymore, it's like everything's turned off and there's this weird ringing- this buzzing in his ears.

"Everything alright in here?" Charlie asks as him and Billy emerge in the doorway.

"Y-yeah." Jack says weakly. The drugs in his system will take a couple of hours to kill him but it will be quick in its own way. He won't feel any pain, he'll just drift off into a slumber in which he'll never wake from. A permanent, dreamless slumber.

"I'll give you a minute." Steve says before getting up to leave but Jack's hand is holding on tightly to his wrist preventing him from doing so. Steve looks down at it then up to Jack who smiles.

"Thank you, Steve. Thanks for everything."

Steve tries to smile back but he's not sure if he'll ever really smile again.

"How's it looking, Doctor." Steve asks the man as Billy struggles to get his shirt on over the cast on his wrist. It takes a minute longer but eventually he gets it on. The doctor meanwhile looks at his newly done X-rays and test results determining if Billy is healing properly. He looks at the blood test results a little more closely, causing Steve to worry slightly more than he already is but he doesn't have to for long. It's only a short moment before they get their answer but it feels like a lifetime for Steve. He holds his breath, worry filling his veins. It's not like Billy did everything he was supposed to, a few drinks here and there, and so much smoking, but under the circumstances Steve couldn't really find it in himself to argue with Billy.

"Looks good." The doctor says eventually. "Everything's on track. You're very lucky, son."

He says the last part to Billy who grimaces at the 'lucky' part. He doesn't feel very lucky, not with all the shit that's happened and not the way things have been going on between him and Steve. Last night they fucked for the first time in forever and it was supposed to be hot, passionate, and everything but instead it was cold and hollow. Steve wasn't really there and Billy doesn't know how to bring him back. All he could do was hold on to him tightly and try to convey through the physical that he loves him. That he cares. That they're here, that they're okay. He never thought he'd be the one trying to

get Steve back, to get through to him, he always thought it would the other way around but it's not. In fact he doesn't think about Neil one bit.

"Great. Can we go?" Billy asks already half way out the door.

"Sure, sure. But remember, three weeks and I want you back here to get that cast off." The doctor reminds him.

"Whatever." Is Billy's response as he walks out of the hospital room, leaving Steve to apologize on his behalf once again but Steve doesn't. He simply follows Billy, his eyes still lost somewhere only he can see.

"You talk to Max lately?" Billy asks as Steve starts the car and drive out of the hospital's parking lot.

"No." Is Steve's quick response. Ever since they got back from Jack's a week ago Steve hasn't really talked to anyone, not that Billy's has either but it's normal for Billy, not for Steve. "Have you?"

"Yeah. She came by when you were at the store. Dustin's been calling. Maybe you should I dunno, get your head out of your ass?"

"Yeah, maybe." Steve's says in that same distracted voice that he's had for the past week and a half.

"Alright now you're just being a bitch." Billy tells him seriously as he lights another cigarette.

"Fuck you." Is Steve's response but there's no heat behind. In fact, there's nothing at all, and that scares Billy more than he's willing to admit.

62. "I Wish I Could Wake At Dawn To See You Without Make Up On."

Steve wakes blurrily as the ringing in his ears that woke him up makes it sound like he's underwater. There's a banging in his head that makes him instinctively put his hand up to the side to try to stop it. He's also trying to stop the dizziness that overcomes him as he lifts his head up from his pillow. There's a bright shining light that overpowers all of his senses as soon as he faces it. It's his bed side lamp of course but why is it on? The clock reads, 3:34am beside the lamp and that's not right. When did he fall asleep? He can't really remember. Him and Billy were drinking beer then started doing shots and-

"Billy?" Steve calls as he looks over his shoulder to where the bed is cool as rain. No trace of the other on the tightly tucked sheets and blankets that became habit from his father who was very briefly in the military. He always liked a neat, clean place and Steve sort of adopted that with his bedding and other things. Although his desk obviously didn't get the memo with headphones laid haphazardly over old exam review sheets and essays for his English exam that he stressed way too much over. Billy on the other hand is the complete opposite which tells him that he never came to bed last night, or this morning whenever it was that he stopped being fully conscious of himself, when everything became a blur.

Steve sighs as he rubs his eyes and stretches slightly. He rolls over and places his feet on the floor as he gets out of the bed. He swaggers to the left but quickly steadies himself on his wall. He stops for a few moments to get back his balance, all the while the phone continues to ring and ring. It must be pretty damn important if they don't quit after so long. It's with that thought in his head that Steve makes another attempt and succeeds in getting down the stairs (as he and Billy had moved back into Steve's room once they got back from California, Billy claiming that he's all healed.) Steve passes through the living room with no sign of Billy but once he gets to the kitchen he sees him.

"Really?" Steve asks incredulously as they make eye contact, Billy

sitting at the kitchen table and smoking slowly like he has all the time in the world.

“What?” Billy asks in what’s supposed to be a clueless voice but Steve sees right through it.

“The fucking phone, Billy.”

Billy simply shrugs his shoulders in response looking way less drunk than he should be with the amount he can remember that they drank. Steve doesn’t ponder it long as he reaches for the phone that’s drilling a large hole in his head with its shrilling ringtone. Steve has half a mind to pull it off its hinges and throw it to the ground once again but he doesn’t have the strength and his dad will probably figure out that something’s up if he sees another bill for yet another phone. Also he’s still pretty drunk and obviously not thinking straight. It’s a miracle at all that he smothers the impulse as he puts the phone to his ear.

“What?” Steve asks probably too loud than need be.

“Steve?” It’s Nancy and why the fuck is she calling at this hour?

“Yeah, what- why are you calling, Nance? It’s three in the m-”

“I know.” She cuts off. “But there was an attack. I know I said I wasn’t going to call you Steve since what happened with Billy’s friend but things got so out of control and-”

“Attacked?” Steve asks and the new fear in his voice matches Nancy’s.

“Yeah, yeah, it was Eleven and Max. They uh, just get over to the Buyers, okay? Just hurry. And bring an extra first aid kit!”

Before Steve can question her further the dial tone is singing in his ear and she’s long gone. It takes a second before his brain catches up with what just happened and he’s able to put the phone back on the hook. Once he does he notices Billy next to him, concern and curiosity in his gaze as he asks, “Who the hell was attacked?”

“I- Jane and Max. I’m sorry.”

“Fuck.” Billy whispers as his hand rubs across his face. “Where is she?”

“The Buyers. Nance wants us to come over and bring a first aid kit.” Steve explains as Billy paces back and forth.

“Fuck. Yeah, okay, let’s go.”

“Wait, wait.”

“What?” Billy asks irritated at being stopped.

“I think I’m drunk.” Steve admits quietly which almost makes Billy smiles before the knowledge of their predicament comes crashing back in.

“I’ll drive.”

“Shit, you drank too, Hargrove.”

“I have a higher tolerance.” Billy says matter of fact and Steve doesn’t doubt it for a second, not in the obvious sober state he’s in now. “And before you say anything else the doctor said I’m healed. My hand doesn’t even hurt no more.”

Billy holds up his casted hand for emphasis but Steve doesn’t need it. He knows it’s true and people they care about are hurt. They have to get there as soon as possible and so Steve nods in agreement. He tells him to get the car and he’ll get the first aid kit. They’re out of the house in less than five minutes and at the Buyers in less than ten. Steve’s pretty sure there were laws broken to get here.

“Steve, thank God.” Nancy says as she answer the door and leans in to hug Steve tightly.

“Yeah, it’s me.” Steve tells her as Nancy pulls away causing Steve to smile as he notices her appearance. “Really Nance? I wish I could wake at dawn to see you without make up on. I bet no one’s ever seen that.”

“Shut up. Jonathan and I were on a date.”

She blushes and Steve smirks as he starts to feel more like his old self again. "At three AM?"

"Alright, this is fun but where the hell is Max?" Billy cuts in making Steve's brief buoyancy leave him, and Nancy's face to turn grave.

"She's inside."

63. "You Look The Best Today."

"Billy, what are you doing here?" Max asks in her usual angry way as Billy and Steve walk through Will's room to find her lying on his bed. Her voice lacks its usual muster though and it doesn't take a genius to figure out why. Her face is black on one side, as dark as the sky. It criss-crosses across her face like tendrils. It ripples and moves, a living virus that can be seen to all, taking over and destroying her. She can barely move but she tries to sit up only to lay back down in a huff of frustration. This is not at all like what Will was affected with last year, this is not an invisible entity trying to take over to gain insight, this is a poison striking and taking over to do one thing; to kill.

"Wheeler called us." Billy answers her after a drawn out breath as he takes in the sight in front of him. It's too much like when he saw Jack for the first time after finding out he was dying. The way he was so weak and not himself. The way he tried to move but couldn't. His coughing hurt to watch and listen to just like how Max starts to cough as soon as he answers her. It's painful and once she's done and Nancy has taken the tissue away it's black. Not blood but black goo, the poison. It reminds Steve too of Jack. It's a shock for them both but in slightly different ways.

"I know. I look awful." She tries to roll her eyes in a nonchalant way but the trembling in her voice gives her fear away easily. In that moment she's not the smartass kid, the new one in the group; she's just a girl, a kid. Jack may have been young but at least he got to live some kind of life, even if it was short, Max has never really gotten that, but she will. Whatever this is, death is not an option concludes Billy.

"You look the best today." Billy tries to reassure. He then looks to Nancy who stands close by and asks, "Where's the Chief?"

"Hopper? He's out looking for this thing." Nancy replies as she looks nervously to Max who listens to the conversation intently. "Maybe we should talk outside?"

Billy's head snaps up, his next words maybe just a little too vicious

as he says, "Maxine is a tough son of a bitch, she can handle whatever you have to say."

Nancy blushes slightly at being reprimanded but doesn't lash back out at him as she realizes how much stress he must be under. Despite that it takes all her will power not to snap at him. She never really did like him. "I told you the gist of it already, but we think- Eleven thinks- knows, whatever, that the cure is from the Demogorgon."

"So what tried to kill her is the only thing that can cure her?" Steve asks as he takes a step forward.

"Yeah. That's why everyone is out there looking. But it's been over two hours."

She doesn't have to say it when they're all already thinking it; it's looking grimmer and grimmer for Maxine Hargrove.

"Alright. Okay. Come on Steve, let's go." Billy says as he nods his head and makes his way out the door. Nancy and Steve are quick on his heels as they make their way into the living room.

"Wait." Steve says stopping him as the kids who are trying unsuccessfully to watch a movie to distract themselves look up. Joyce who was smoking in the kitchen sticks her head out to see what all the commotion is.

"What?" Billy snaps at Steve impatiently at having to waste so much time talking about this stupid shit instead of doing something about it.

"We can't just go barrelling out there!"

"And the why the hell not?"

"For one your injured and-" Steve tries but is soon interrupted.

"That's the lamest excuse ever and you know it." Billy argues, suddenly becoming self-conscious as he notices the many pairs of eyes on them. "Come or not, that's up to you."

Billy storms out of the Buyer's residence leaving Steve sighing in

frustration, fingers tightly wound in his hair. “Fuck.” He whispers to himself, momentarily forgetting that there are kids in the room, before going after him.

“Are they like best friends now?” Dustin asks confused in the midst of the tense silence left by the two teenagers.

Everyone scoffs and shakes their heads in exasperation.

“What? What did I say?”

Lucas who sits next to him puts his hand on his shoulder, shakes his head and says, “I’m going to sit with Max.”

“Wait! What did I say?” Dustin asks desperately after him before turning his head to Eleven who’s laughing behind her hand. “What?”

Outside, Billy walks quickly to his car and pops the trunk. He pulls out Steve’s bat and hands it to him. He takes a large hunting knife in its sheath and attaches it to his belt. He tightens it quickly as Steve all the while stares at him incredulously before saying, “Billy, we can’t go after this thing.”

“If you’re too much of a pussy then stay behind and watch Willy Wonka with the rest of the kids.”

“Alright, first of all, that’s a damn good movie. Second of all, we don’t even know where to start or really where to go.”

“I don’t care.” Billy says angrily. “Nobody else is dying, not if I have anything to do with it.”

That stops Steve cold and he can’t quite find it in himself to argue anymore as Billy starts walking up ahead of him into the forest. He briefly looks behind toward Steve and asks with a slightly hopeful twinge of his voice, “You coming?”

Steve swallows back the guilt and pain that is threatening to blow over him and answers with, “Yeah. Yeah I’m coming.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Aw, poor Dustin, always left out of the loop. As for the others, they're thoughts on Billy and Steve's relationship is something we don't fully get to see here but I hope to show it some more in later chapters.

64. "I've Been Right Here Waiting For You To Wake Up."

"What the fuck happened?" Billy asks groggily as he rises from the bed very slowly, the dull painful ache in his head returning at full force. He feels hands on him trying to hold him down but he shakes them off. They don't entirely leave though, staying on his shoulder and the other on his jaw as if checking to see if he's okay. It takes him a few minutes before the black dots in his vision fade and he can see who it is. It's Steve fucking Harrington of course.

"You were being stupid, again." Steve says angrily but there's more relief than rage in that voice as he looks Billy over, checking something on his forehead. And shit, fuck that hurts. He presses a wet cloth and when it pulls away Billy can see the obvious blood from a wound. A head wound to be exact which matches his symptoms to a T.

"Ow, fucking hurts." Billy complains as Steve presses none too gently.

"Yeah, well maybe you'll think of that next time you go charging at a monster from another world that could have torn you apart in seconds. You're fucking lucky that Hopper caught up with us."

"Right..."

"You don't remember what happened to you, do you?" Steve asks and there's worry in his eyes but not much surprise.

Billy shakes his head no, seeing how there's no getting out of this one.

"Shit, we gotta take you to the hospital."

"No, fuck, no. I'm fine." Billy says desperately as his hand holds onto Steve's wrist, stopping him from moving.

"Billy-"

"Just tell me what happened. Are you okay? You didn't go charging

after whatever it was?”

“Unlike you I’m not a dumbass. Max should be fine though thanks to you.” Steve tells him almost reluctantly.

“So it worked? Wait what do you mean, ‘should be’?” Billy asks.

“I didn’t watch them give her the antidote. I’ve been right here waiting for you to wake up.”

“I gotta see her.”

“Woah.” Steve says as Billy stands up unsteadily. Steve reaches out his hands and helps him to stand straight. He wants to tell him that no matter what he fucking says he’s going to a doctor but he needs to see his sister and Steve needs to see her too. They make their way to Will’s room from Jonathan’s where Billy was laid out. When they get there they find practically everyone else in there as well.

“She okay?” Billy asks nervously as he lets go of Steve and walks closer to Max who lays on the bed, the black tendrils retreating slowly.

“Yeah, son, she’ll be fine.” Hopper responds, but that’s not good enough for Billy and he finds himself looking to Jane for confirmation.

“She’s okay.” Jane’s quiet but strong voice says as her hand lands on Billy’s arm. “Papa did this to me and I was fine.”

There’s so much fucked up shit in that one sentence that Billy doesn’t even know where to start. Everyone else in the room seems equally as lost and disturbed, but not as shocked as he. Most avoid their eyes as the burning questions arise in Billy’s brain. He wants to yell them out but he can’t, right now he has to focus on Max. His eyes find her unconscious face where her body gradually relaxes more and more. Her discomfort seems to be dissipating.

“Alright.” Joyce says, authority in her tone. “Everybody out. Maxine needs her rest and she needs quiet.”

There are a few grumbles of the worried kids but eventually almost

all are out of the room. The only ones who remain are Joyce, Billy, and Lucas who refuses to leave her side again. He blames this slightly on himself as he was supposed to be there to meet her. He doesn't even consider blaming Eleven as he knows there was nothing she could have when she was knocked out like that, but himself? He should have been there. Max is his- his, she's special. She's important. He brought her into this monster filled world and he knows she can protect herself but he should have been there.

"Thanks." Billy says in the now quiet room.

Lucas looks up to meet Billy's eyes.

"For looking out for her. Being there."

Billy looks back down to Max and Lucas isn't sure what he should say to that. Joyce simply watches the interaction, a small smile on her lips. Maybe Billy Hargrove isn't as evil as everyone seems to think. There has to be something good in him if Steve is with him. Steve has one of the biggest hearts around aside from her boys of course, thinks Joyce as she watches Billy watch Max. 'Yeah, maybe he isn't so bad.'

"You okay, Steve?" Nancy asks as she walks up to Steve who leans against the house outside. He fiddles with a piece of tape he found in his pocket. If he was a smoker he would be doing that now but he's not and so he sticks with the tape. The way it sticks to his thumb then crumbles under his index and middle finger. How it doesn't fall when he lets go, staying stuck to his palm. The texture that ripples on his skin as he pushes it back and forth on the top of his hand.

"Yeah." Steve answers but he's not looking at her when he says it. "Everyone's okay, right?"

"I don't know. You tell me. Are you okay?"

It's Nancy's honest concern that really strikes a chord with Steve. She's always been there for him as a friend more than anything else they had. He was always able to talk to her like they've known each other forever and even though she always had her own opinion, Steve values it very highly. When he didn't know what to do he

would go to her. She always had something to say and it would usually help whether he wanted to hear it or not.

Steve finally looks up and meets her eyes. "Nance I-"

"Steve! Steve!" Dustin comes running out, a look of fear in his eyes.

"What!?" Both Steve and Nancy ask at the same time.

"It's Billy."

Oh.

"He just collapsed."

There's a hole somewhere deep within and he's falling, oh he's falling so far. Which way is up? Which way is 'right'?

"And he's twitching and moaning. I- I don't- Just hurry!"

It's Billy.

It's Billy.

It's *Billy*.

65. "You Think You're Better Than Them."

"I hate this song," Billy says with irritation as he looks Jack squarely in the eyes.

Jack smiles smugly. "I know."

"Fuck you."

Jack only laughs at him. They're in a mixture of Steve's living room and Jack's apartment. It's Steve's record player but Jack's couch. The walls are the same plain beige but they're covered with posters of bands and musicians that Jack loves. It's what littered his walls back at his place when they were there a few weeks ago. The Clash and the Smiths. Bands that Billy hates but a few he doesn't mind like Led Zeppelin and Foreigner. The song currently playing is from one of the ones he does mind; The Clash. He really hates this song.

"Why am I here?" Billy asks Jack as he realizes that this isn't right. He can feel it in his bones, something is wrong. He's not supposed to be here.

"No, you're not." Jack answers and it's eerie how he can somehow read his mind. "I'm not reading your mind, asshole. I am your mind."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Jack?" Billy feels a shiver of fear run through him at his words and at this whole fucking situation. He's not supposed to be here. Steve is waiting for him, Steve was here.

"You're right. You're not supposed to be here. You think you're better than them. Better because you know more about pain than them, more about life. But there's one that is striking to match you... Steve's waiting and he needs you. He's done something."

"Done what?"

"You don't know, so I don't know." Jack explains as he takes a seat on the brown leather couch that looks exactly like the one from his apartment, but they're in Steve's living room so how does that make sense? As if reading his mind again Jack says, "It doesn't."

"I don't understand. What the fuck is going on?" Billy asks angrily as he

glares at Jack, confusion and fear mingling together.

Jack smiles sadly. "Did you think that you would come away unscathed? You always knew that no matter how it ended with dear daddy you wouldn't get away that easy."

Billy's eyebrows scrunch together in confusion. What is he talking about? Well, it's obvious, he's talking about his dad but in what regard? That he's hurt more than he admits? Like he's some girl who cries at every bad thing that ever happened to him? Because that would flood the whole damn world, like that girl in the story his mom used to read to him. What was that called? He can't quite remember.

"It was Alice in Wonderland." Jack fills in giving him a knowing look that makes Billy startle slightly.

"Stop fucking doing that!" Billy yells at him. "I have to go! I have to find Steve. Where the fuck is he?"

"Fine. Fine, you can go." Jack holds up his hands in defense but then lowers them as his features grow weary and tired. "But remember Billy..."

Then there's a voice behind him speaking that's not Jack's. It says, "Steve needs you." Billy turns quickly to see the face he knows whose voice it belongs to but just as he does so a bright light blinds him, preventing him from getting a clear view. He holds his hands up against it but someone's tugging them away, down.

"It's okay Billy. It's okay, I'm right here."

Ste-

"Steve." Billy groans, his head pounding fiercely in his skull. He tries to put a hand up against the throbbing lump that's probably starting to form but hands push his own away and down. The light goes back and forth, a voice telling him to follow it. It's not Steve's but he listens anyway, still too out of it to really process what's going on around him.

"I'm right here, Billy. You're going to be okay." Steve says to him gently, his hand on his shoulder squeezing gently.

“Alright, he’s responding well.” That unknown voice says but it’s not unknown for long as Billy gains back his senses. He immediately recognizes the old weathered face in front of him with the shining bright light to be the doctor that treated him before. He’s in the hospital no doubt, but what happened? Where’s Steve?

“Steve?”

“Yeah, Billy, I’m here.”

Billy’s eyes automatically follow the voice to his right side to see Steve standing there, his eyes bloodshot and worry written all over his features. “I’m right here.” He reassures, his thumb rubbing soft circles into the skin of his shoulder.

“What happened?” Billy asks, his words slightly garbled.

“You had a seizure, Mr. Hargrove.” The doctor supplies as he rights something on a clip board. “We did some tests while you were still slightly out of it, you probably don’t remember.”

“No.” Billy’s voice is more sure and steady. “What’s wrong with me?”

“Well, Mr. Harrington here tells me that you fell down some stairs and hit your head. Combine that with your previous head trauma and your seizure our best guess is a more long term head injury. We didn’t catch it before because these times of injuries don’t show up on our usual equipment.”

“What are you talking about? What the fuck does that mean?”

Steve’s eyes are devastating and so sorrowful that the panic in Billy starts to become overwhelming as the doctor takes a minute to answer. His mouth moving, trying to find the right words before saying, “I’m sorry Mr. Hargrove but I’m afraid that this seizure is not going to be a onetime only thing. There’s so much about the brain that we don’t understand yet but I have seen injuries such as yours.”

“What do you mean like mine?”

“Long term trauma to the brain.”

Oh.

“We can give you medication to stabilize your seizures and some to help with the pain I have no doubt you’ve been experiencing. Am I correct in assuming there has been some dizzy spells as well? Perhaps mood changes?”

“Yeah.” Billy answers quietly as he purposely avoids Steve’s watchful and worried gaze.

“Alright. I’ll right out a prescription. I’ll need you to check in with me next week to see if there’s any side effects. After that, once a month I’ll be seeing you to try and monitor this as best and able as we can. I can go into the specifics if you would like although as I said there’s much we don’t know about the human brain and the ramifications of such injuries as...”

The doctor keeps talking but Billy’s not listening anymore. It’s all just white noise to him now. The words, ‘long term head injury’ going over and over in his mind like a never ending cycle.

Long term head Injury.

“What exactly does ‘long term head injury mean?’” Billy asks, cutting off the doctor mid-sentence.

Steve takes in a sharp intake of breath as the doctor looks at him sympathetically.

“It’s not something we’re able to cure, I’m afraid. We just don’t have the technology yet, nor is there much medical knowledge on these types of injuries to the brain known. I’m sorry, son, but it’s a life-long condition.”

Notes for the Chapter:

And the punches just keep on coming, don't they?

66. "I Hope You End Up Missing Me."

"Go fish." Billy tells Max with a smirk as Max sticks out her tongue at him. This is the fourth time he's said those words which in his book means that he's winning. Would you look at that? He is. He's always been good at cards, grant you, usually it's poker he's playing or blackjack but Maxine is a little young for that just now and it takes too long to explain all those rules so he decided on simple Go Fish, which is actually one of her favorite games. Apparently her and her dad, her real not his piece of shit father, used to play it all the time up until he had his accident at work.

"So, where's Steve?" Max asks none too casually as she picks out a card from the pile.

"Not here." Is Billy's simple response as he shuffles his cards around, deciding which one he's going to ask for.

"Well, duh, but it's Friday. Don't you- I don't know, always hang out on Fridays?"

"No."

Max huffs out in frustration at Billy's noncompliance with her questioning. What she was really trying to say without actually saying is 'it's Friday, date night, why aren't you out with Steve?' But she knows how sensitive Billy can be about the whole queer thing and she doesn't want to piss him off and never agree to 'babysit' her again. She won't ever admit it out loud but she likes when he's here. Ever since Neil left and he left it's been really quiet. Her mom's had to work extra shifts and it's been kind of lonely. Of course Lucas and the others are around a lot but they can't all be together 24/7. They have families and lives, Max not so much. Most of the time it's just her but then her mom asked if Billy would watch her one late night and it sort of stuck. Max isn't complaining, not really, not with any words that have any real heat behind them anyway.

"I just- We haven't seen him around very much." Max continues as she thinks back to Dustin complaining earlier about the lack of Steve's presence lately. He made Max swear that she would question

Billy and although she was reluctant to bring it up with Billy she too is wondering like all the other kids about what the hell is going on with Steve. Usually he's always picking Dustin up, or one of them, being the unofficial chaperone but lately he's just not there.

"Right." Billy says with clenched teeth, holding back the usual anger at unpleasant situations that wants to snarl out at whoever is causing it. He's trying to be better, to do better, especially for Max. He kind of owes her after Neil, doesn't he?

"I'm only asking because-"

"Maxine would you SHUT THE HELL UP ABOUT STEVE?" Billy breathes heavily as the sentence leaves his lips. Max is leaning back, a slightly scared expression on her face. It makes Billy stop and cringe as he realizes what he did. The fear and shock that radiates from her is enough to cause an emotional slap to his face. What the hell was he thinking? What's wrong with him? He scared her. He yelled. He-

Just like Neil.

"I gotta go." He spits out the words in a hurry, throwing the cards to the ground in a flurry as he slips his jacket on. Max is too shocked by his outburst to stop him as he makes his way out of the house into the blackness of night. He gets in his car as quickly as possible, slamming the door behind him. His head immediately rests on the steering wheel as he tries to even his breathing out. He so badly wants a cigarette but he had his last one before coming here and he was already late enough that he didn't want to chance it to the store to pick up a new pack. "Fuck." He whispers as he puts the key in the injection and turns it slowly, once it starts he's driving out of there as fast as he possibly can.

"Steve?" Billy calls out tentatively as he walks through the front door of the Harrington residence. He's probably called this place 'home' a couple of times but it's not his, not really. This is Steve's place, his domain and Billy is merely a guest. He knows it and Steve knows it too.

"Yeah?" Steve asks as he lifts his head up off of the couch. An old

black and white movie is playing on the television, probably a rerun on cable as Billy can't see the light on the VHS player flashing.

"Hey, I'm back." Billy tells him lamely as he stands in front of the couch.

"You're early." He doesn't take his eyes off the screen as he says these words. His body is covered underneath a blanket but it's obvious to Billy that he's lost some more weight. It's not overly obvious but Billy's spent many hours getting to know Steve's body, even the smallest changes he's able to notice now. Aside from that though, Steve hasn't been eating much and Billy is sort of worried which is a strange thing for him to admit to himself. Worried. Him. Billy Hargrove. Worried. Even saying it in his head doesn't sound right.

"I was going to make some scrambled eggs. You want any?" Billy never knew how to cook until he met Steve who showed him some basic things before, when things were easier but after he stopped eating so much Billy went to Joyce. He didn't exactly tell her what was happening only that he wanted to know how to make some proper food and if she would help him, of course she said yes. Now he tries to make things that he knows Steve likes, hoping it will encourage him to eat some more.

"No thanks. I think I'm going to head to bed." Steve says in that same monotone voice as he slowly stands, the blanket wrapped around himself as he takes a step towards the stairs and to his bedroom.

"Steve, when's the last time you ate?" Billy asks after him hopelessly.

"I'm not hungry."

Billy watches him walk up the stairs almost helplessly as Steve doesn't even bother to turn around to look at him. In a quiet sort of voice, as Steve disappears completely from view, Billy whispers, "I hope you end up missing me. 'Cause the rate you're going you'll be in the ground soon."

It's possible that Steve hears him, but even if he did, he wouldn't say anything to respond to that. This is something Billy's sure of. He would either ignore it or pretend he didn't hear it as he does with

most of the important things Billy tells him lately. It's like he doesn't exist. It's like Steve believes that he himself doesn't exist.

It chills Billy to the bone and leaves him in a helpless state with every piece of himself fearful for another; for Steve, a feeling he's never known before. A feeling he doesn't know what to do with. His whole life, he's never helped a damn soul other than himself, how is he supposed to change that now?

How does he help him when he's never really even helped himself before?

67. "Your Friends Will Always Just Be In Your Way."

It's the feeling more than the thought that sticks with him. It washes over him like a wave. Sometimes it is calm and simply an ocean but it is still always there. It can turn into a small wave that becomes a tsunami or a tsunami that shrinks back into a wave. There is no real clear warning or sign to as when it will come but come it does. Steve tries to brace himself the best that he can against it but it is a pointless battle. The wave always wins. The feeling always destroys something. Some part of him that he didn't even know he had or didn't even know could be destroyed. If not destroyed though, irrevocably damaged.

The feeling is most simply put as guilt but it is so much more than that. It's a complex design that has pieces and names all over the place. It is not something that can easily be dissected or understood. It's a vast network that play all over his mind and if a soul is true, possible, than that too. Steve does the best that he can to ride out this wave, to make it through alive and in some sort of decent shape but it's not always easy. There are distractions that help like sex and good movies. Sometimes he drinks if it's really bad but he hates that stuff. It coming up afterward sort of counteracts the effect it has going down. He does his best to stay away from that no matter how tempting it sometimes can be. All in all, he does the best that he can, so why can't anyone else see that? Why is it not enough to be here? To keep going?

"Steve, we have to talk about this." Billy says and when Steve looks up he knows that he's serious. He sees the unmistakable fear and worry that clouds his eyes and infects every particle of him. He means what he says but he is nervous, scared about how to do this, about how to confront. Billy's never cared, Steve realizes, or well he has but not with anything that matters. He matters. To Billy, he matters? Jack mattered too. He was a human being and he mattered. 'But he was going to die anyway,' that other voice whispers in the back of his head, 'he was.'

"Steve!" Billy says, his features now a little angry but more worried than anything. Steve looks up to meet his eyes and sees all this. Was

he talking to him before? Did he say something else? He can't quite remember. That little voice started talking to him, then another, and then he knew no more... "Steve?"

"Yeah?" Steve asks, his eyes on Billy's, more focused as everything starts to clarify, even if it is only momentary.

"Fucking forget it." Billy shakes his head and gets up from the kitchen table, cereal bowl in hand. He drops it in the sink with a clang and walks out. He yells over his shoulder, "I'm taking Maxine to the arcade."

He thinks that he sees shadows, black shadows dancing in his vision but he can't be sure. There's teeth too, sharp snapping jaws that taunt and tempt him all in one but that's not real. That can't be. It's not true and yet they snap and slither across his feet. They have dark skin that criss-crosses in patterns of even more darkness. He stares at them hard to try and decipher what they are but every time he tries to see, to really see, they're gone. They're gone and he's not even sure that they even were. Sometimes they're outside of his vision, whispering, 'your fault, your fault,' but he can't be sure because just like the shadows every time he focuses on it they're gone and he's not sure if there ever really was a voice.

"You're still sitting here." Billy says, stating the obvious but his voice holds more fear than certainty.

Steve looks up at him and says almost automatically, "No. I just sat down. I was going to have lunch."

"With what food?"

Oh. He didn't think of that.

"Steve what the hell?" Billy asks once again but there is no response from him, like there ever would be and so Billy simply shakes his head. "Hotdogs okay with you?"

"Yeah, sure."

He wants to reach out to Billy, to touch, to entice him with words. He wants to let him know what's going on in his head. He wants to

tell him that he killed Jack and that it wasn't the AIDS, it was him. Hell, he wants to scream it out at the top of his lungs but then at the next moment he wants to push it down to the furthest recesses of his minds and never touch it again. He wants to stomp on it and spit at it, an ugly fact of his truth, of his life that he never wants to be associated with again, but he can't do that. He can't do either of those things. The telling Billy because it will hurt him and the forgetting because with something like this, that's impossible.

"Ketchup?" Billy asks as he holds the bottle over Steve's bun, and when did he cook those hotdogs? Steve could have sworn he was just pulling out the pot.

"Yeah, okay." Steve tells him and then almost as an afterthought asks, "Relish?"

Billy smiles at that. He laughs slightly and says, "Sure, I'll get you your disgusting relish."

"Hey! I'm not the one having mustard on my bun."

"Fuck you."

But it's all light hearted and carefree. There's no bite behind any of their words, and the only lingering sound between them is laughter and the air, and an easiness in their bones. Steve wants so badly for this to last but he knows that it can't, soon the shadows will be back and he wants to tell Billy but he can't do that either. Maybe he should tell Nancy, but then that voice that isn't really there (or is it?) whispers, 'Your friends will always just be in your way.' And yes, that's true, isn't? She'll know what's wrong and she'll tell Billy. Billy can't know, he must never know that Steve killed his best friend. He must never know no matter what it takes because it will break him. Steve is sure of that too.

In the absence of the once easygoing atmosphere that turned chilly so quickly, they eat their hotdogs in the unbearable silence rather than the laughter they both would have preferred but can't have.

68. "I'm Just Getting Started, Let Me Offend."

"I swear if Steve doesn't come to the meeting tonight I'm going over to his house to see him and I'll break in if I have to. I don't care." Fumes Dustin as he stares out the Buyer's living room window waiting for that familiar rumble signalling that Steve's car is pulling up.

"I'm sure he's fine, man." Lucas responds. "Max said that Billy said he was fine."

"No offense but I don't trust Billy as far as I can throw him. For all we know he's murdered Steve and has him in the downstairs freezer!"

"Now why would he do that?"

"Well duh? Because he's e v i l. Also, free rent." Dustin explains making Lucas huff out in exasperation. The other kids simply watch the exchange with a shake of the head. Eleven even giggles at Dustin's antics, knowing full well that Billy would never do such a thing. The others who are aware of the extent of Billy and Steve's relationship can't help but agree with that sentiment. Sure, Billy's an asshole, but he's actually been- What's the word? Less assholeish? That sounds about right.

"Dustin, man, he's fine, okay? Probably just busy with something. Anyway, don't say this in front of Billy, okay? You'll offend him." Mike tries to reason, not wanting to have an explosive argument between Billy and Dustin tonight when they're supposed to be focusing on the Upside Down.

"I'm just getting started, let me offend." Dustin says with a sharp gaze, then with a more defeated voice, realizing that Mike may have a point, "Maybe I won't confront him but I'll still break if I have to. I'm not leaving Steve in his evil hair- clutches."

Max who just walks in rolls her eyes. "Really? This shit again? He's fine, Dustin. Trust me. Billy won't hurt him."

"Whatever." Dustin tells her. "Whatever you say, Maxine, just like

always.”

“Hey, I’ll have you know-”

She doesn’t get to finish her sentence as a distinctive rumble sounds through to them from the outside. It’s not Steve’s, but another they know and has Will racing to the window. He looks back at everyone in record time to say, “It’s Billy. He’s here.”

“What about Steve?” Dustin, Lucas, and Mike seem to all ask in union. No matter how much Lucas and Mike believe that he’s fine, they still kind of miss him. He’s been the unofficial member to their group since the last time the Upside Down took a full swing at them.

“Uhh...” Will says as he squints through the darkness of the night, but the boys and Max are already up on the couch, noses pressed against the window to see for themselves. It takes a few minutes before a clear picture can be seen and almost simultaneously they all sigh in disappointment. No Steve, only Billy.

“You’re probably all wondering why I called a meeting at this hour but Jim was called to a crime scene earlier this evening.” Joyce explains to them all as they sit around the kitchen table. A few, Lucas, Billy, Jonathan, and Nancy stand, either leaning closer to the table or away from it with their backs up against the wall. All have that same look of apprehension, fear, and uncertainty as Joyce looks more serious than she’s ever been. The kids all listen eagerly, their heads leaned toward Mrs. Buyer’s in that childlike curiosity that hasn’t quite left them yet. “There was a death with unusual circumstances.”

“What kind of unusual circumstances?” Nancy asks the question everyone’s thinking.

“There were markings, carvings. It looked ritualistic, is how Jim put it.” Joyce does her best to explain it without too many of the grisly details she knows, but even she doesn’t know the full details just yet, grisly or otherwise.

“Wait, that doesn’t make sense.” Nancy says, her hands out and her features confused.

“Yeah, all the other people just disappeared.” Jonathan adds in. “There were no real murders. How do you know this has anything to do with the Upside Down?”

“Because of this.”

Joyce reaches into her pocket and pulls out a piece of paper. She carefully unfolds it and lays it out on the table. Everyone gasps.

As Dustin so eloquently puts it, “Holy shit.”

“Steve?” Billy calls out into the quiet and dark house a few hours later, after the meeting dispersed. He gets no response but he was counting on that. Steve’s probably already in bed sleeping. He goes to bed earlier and earlier lately then gets up later and later every day. Sleeping seems to have become one of his favourite past times. Billy tries to ask him about it, to talk to him, but that’s almost impossible. Steve just looks past him, or through him, one or the other and Billy ends up leaving after the conversation with more uncertainty and helplessness than he felt going into it. “Son of a bitch!”

Billy had turned the corner into the kitchen finding Steve standing there, his back to him. He looks like a dark shadow that could be anything if he didn’t know after a few more seconds of observation the outline and feel from a distance of his body. That’s why he swore, he wasn’t sure at first who it was, thinking it could be an intruder, not to mention being certain only moments ago that Steve was fast asleep in his bed. After all, why else would he not answer him? Then again, he doesn’t talk much at all lately, even less to Billy it seems which doesn’t make sense since there’s no one else here he can talk to and he hasn’t really seen anyone lately.

“You scared the shit out of me.” Billy says with his hand on his rapidly beating heart.

“Sorry.” Steve says almost delicately as he turns his head slightly, revealing half of his features, the other half still hidden in the darkness of the kitchen. The light that’s on in the living room illuminates it slightly but not enough.

“It’s fine.” Billy says almost curtly as he reaches into the fridge for a

beer. He tops off the cap quickly and takes a long swing. "You missed the meeting. Apparently something or someone is trying to open a gateway between our world and the Upside Down. Fuck, I don't even understand half the words I'm saying. You should have come, you understand this stuff better than I ever will."

"Yeah." Steve says with no feeling behind it. Billy tries to pretend that Steve doesn't sound as lifeless as he looks.

"According to Joyce who was a horror fan back in the day, it has to do with some guy named Lovecraft. Who the hell calls himself Lovecraft? Fucking idiot. Anyway, bottom line we got patrols on Thursdays and Saturdays. You in?"

"No." It's short and sweet, to the point. It stuns Billy a little (not that much does these days), and makes his feet and lips freeze up, unable to protest or make a sound as Steve leaves the kitchen. As he descends up the stairs Billy finishes his beer and tosses the bottle into the garbage. He opens the fridge and grabs another one. He drinks this one almost as quickly as the first.

Notes for the Chapter:

Although Stranger Things is more science fiction I believe than anything, in my fic it does tend to incline more towards the fantasy genre. That being said though, this story focuses on Billy and Steve as individuals and together, the "main plot" is sort of background noise which is why we don't always see the whole story for that which I think adds a bit more air of mystery- Which can be a good thing, maybe? (But I do think that I give enough information for you to piece together a story on that front.) Anyway, I hope you all are enjoying this so far. :3 <3

{Can you believe there's only 22 Chapters left?
~Things are about to get a little more interesting.
;).}

69. "The Devil's Got Nothing On Me, My Friend."

Notes for the Chapter:

Classes have started again, which is why updates have been slow, but don't worry I'm still writing this story... Enjoy. :3

"I don't understand, Jack. How can all these people around me be dying?" Steve asks desperately as he clings to the tendrils of his hair, face down.

Jack smiles sympathetically. "It's because you killed me, Steve. I asked you to do it but you're the one who did the deed. You know that."

"So, what? This thing is picking people I know because I helped you die?"

"Killed. But, yes, obviously."

Steve sighs and leans his head against his knees. They're both sitting on the curb in front of a gas station in California that Steve and Billy frequented when they were here a couple of weeks ago. It was nice and they had Billy's favorite smokes at 50 cents less than what it sells at Hawkins. They also sold things like milk and cold cuts, making it an easy place to go when a few things were running low at the apartment. They spent most of their time there, at the apartment, staying late and coming in early. The motel was merely a bed, Charlie and Jack's apartment was where they would eat and spend all their time. It became like a second home in that week and half, a short time but it felt like forever for Steve, and Billy.

"How do I stop it?" Steve asks miserably.

"You know how." Jack says with a smile and a hand on Steve's shoulder.

"No, no, I can't. Billy needs me."

"No he doesn't."

"I don't want to talk about this anymore." Steve says suddenly, standing up. He starts to pace a little as he continues. "I want to wake up now."

"No." Jack says forcefully. "You need to hear this, Steve, it's the only way to stop this."

"I can't do that to Billy, to the kids."

"They're better off without you. If you can kill me, then you can kill anybody."

It doesn't really make sense, but dreams rarely do and to Steve, with all that guilt it seems like the gospel in that moment. He starts chewing his fingernails slightly as he thinks about it. He knows deep within his gut that it's the wrong thing but Jack always sounds so convincing to him, and this thing is targeting people he knows. It makes sense, right?

"Of course it does." Jack says it like he can read Steve's thoughts, but he is in Steve's head isn't, he? So it makes sense, it has to. Steve's head starts to hurt at this jumbling mess but maybe that's the hangover. He did drink last night, probably a lot, he's not really sure though. The last thing Steve remembers is the first shot of vodka then that's it.

"I don't understand any of this." Steve says shaking his head. "She was the best English teacher I ever had. Nothing made sense before she started teaching me and then she helped me, you know? I didn't want to do anything after school, I thought I would start working with my dad- which I didn't really want to do- but then she became my teacher and I actually like English. It made so much more sense and- Fuck."

Steve's fingers find their way into his hair as he pulls desperately trying to make sense of this. His English teacher- God, why can't he remember her name? -She was a mentor or something, but now she's dead. Dead and gone, with markings? Steve's not really sure if he remembers correctly. Billy told him last night and then he had a drink and then another. Then after... He must have had more? Billy left, Steve's pretty sure, he left and he was alone. Steve was alone like he's always been, like he'll-

"Always be." Jack finishes with a smile.

Steve doesn't know what to do so he doesn't say anything. He sits back down on the curb next to Jack and keeps thinking, Jack egging him on to what he has to do. To what he has to finish to keep everyone safe. To make sure that no one else he knows dies next, because it could even be the kids.

Or Nancy, or... Or Billy.

"You know what you have to do." Jack persists.

Steve hesitates once again, then a flash of anger seems to come through him. "Maybe it's you. Maybe you did this!"

"Steve." Billy laughs. "The devils got nothing on me, my friend. This is all about you."

The anger disappears as soon as it appears and Steve slumps forward. "I don't know if I can do this, Jack."

"You're strong, Steve, I know you can."

"Steve, Steve, wake up." Billy says softly as he shakes Steve slightly. They're in Steve's bedroom with Steve on the bed and Billy standing over him. By some miracle he made it here and under the covers last night.

"Wha- B- Billy?" Steve asks as he squints his eyes and tries to get used to his new surroundings.

"Hey, you need to get up. Nancy's here. She wants to see you."

Those words send a shock through Steve's body. Nancy's here? She's not supposed to be here, she's not. He's not supposed to see her. She'll know something is wrong and she'll try to stop him. She will and he has to do this.

"Okay." Steve tells Billy. "I'll be right there."

Billy nods his head at Steve and makes his way out of the room, giving Steve some space to get himself together before seeing Nancy. His clothes are all askew and his hair is a whole other story. Then there's the fact that he smells like gin and vodka. Even if he does clean up, Billy knows that Nancy will know something is wrong and try to help. That's a thing that he can't do himself, help, Billy doesn't know how to. He needs help too, something he can't admit to himself.

Once Billy is gone, Steve gets untangled from the blankets in record time. He puts his jacket on and walks over to the window. He

unlatches it and opens it slowly as to not make a sound. The tree that stares at him when he's done is close enough that he can touch it. Perfect for climbing out and making the ten foot drop to the ground without breaking any bones.

He makes sure to close the window carefully behind him.

70. "All I Want Is To Be Left Alone."

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry this took so long! This chapter was very intense for me to write but I hope I did it justice and that you all enjoy. :)

Steve remembers in the early moments of their relationship when the snow had yet to leave the ground and the second semester of school had barely begun. Billy wouldn't stay very long when he'd come over on the weekends he didn't have to work at the garage. That's something that Steve remembers so vividly, so clearly because he remembers how he felt. He felt so lonely when Billy would leave. He was lonely before Billy too but Billy helped, he was there. He was a warm body and he began to be more. Him to Billy too, even though he didn't admit it for a long time. He always hated when Billy left, but now he was leaving, would Billy hate it too?

He doesn't get very far, only to the outskirts of the forest when both Billy and Nancy catch up. They're both sweaty and panting from the exertion of running and Billy has a wild look in his eyes. He grabs Steve's shoulder and shakes him painfully hard. His eyes blaze as he asks in anger, "What are you doing!? What is wrong with you, Steve!?"

Steve looks down then up, the words he so long to say dying in his throat as the shadows dance behind Billy. They're a warning, Steve knows, that doing this- telling him will only end in travesty. He blinks and they're gone. His eyes now lock with Billy's who has a desperate, pleading grip on him. He's asking questions with both words and expressions but Steve can't bear to look at him anymore so he turns his eyes to Nancy who seems more confused than anything, maybe even a little fearful.

"Billy, Billy stop!" Nancy yells suddenly, getting in-between him and Steve. Billy lets her, taking a step back and sighing in frustration. He walks a few meters away to cool down and Nancy in that reprieve steps closer to Steve. "What's going on, Steve? What's going on with you? The kids are worried, hell, I'm worried. So is Jonathan. We

haven't seen you in weeks."

The shadows aren't dancing around Nancy, in fact they're not here at all. They must have left. Steve's not sure how long he has so he leans forward and in a broken whisper says, "You can't tell Billy, but I killed him, Nance, I killed him."

It was a cold day and Steve had woken with a thrashing scream that dies in his throat as warm, large arms wrap around him. He's scared and confused and he tries to break free but a voice is shushing him. Whispering to him to calm down and he finds himself listening to it. The arms hold him firmly against a chest and a hand in his hair calms the racing heart that beats without mercy. He was dreaming about the Upside down again, he dreamed that he was taken. That he was lost in a world of shadows.

"It's alright, calm down." The voice whispers, but he knows it now, he knows it to be Billy. Which isn't right because usually Billy is gone by now, gone as soon as Steve falls asleep which is pretty damn soon. He doesn't sleep much anymore but after fucking Billy he's more than exhausted and reasonably comfortable to drift into unconsciousness. It also helps to have someone there he's realized not that Billy's very reliable. He's usually gone when he screams himself awake.

"Sorry." Steve says automatically, his voice all scratchy from the screaming. He's calmed down some and the overwhelming terror isn't too bad.

"Don't fucking apologize." Is Billy's response and that surprises Steve, it surprises him a lot.

"Okay." Billy hasn't let go of him, he still has his fingers in his hair and a calming arm around him.

It's the first time he spends the whole night.

"Here." Nancy says gently as she hands Steve a cup of steaming hot cocoa. They're sitting in Steve's kitchen, just the two of them. Somehow Nancy convinced Billy to go out for a drive for a while, leaving them alone. Steve wants to hug Nancy to tell her everything as soon as Billy leaves but it's like those words he spoke outside were a temporary lapse. Afterward he couldn't say anything more about it,

about anything really. Nancy sensed his apprehension, she must have thought it was simply Billy's presence preventing him to speak but it's so much more than that.

"Thanks." Steve says a little hoarsely. He woke up screaming last night, again, and Billy held him and he felt guilty. He tugged out of his embrace as quickly as he could breathe again on his own.

"Talk to me, Steve, tell me what's going on. Who did you kill?" Nancy says it all very slowly but determined, trying not to spook him maybe.

Steve doesn't want to talk to her, he doesn't want her to even be here, not anymore. Why is she? She should mind her own business. "All I want is to be left alone."

"It's a little late for that, Steve. You told me you killed someone. You didn't really mean that did you?"

Steve feels so trapped, so enclosed and he hates it. He stands up suddenly and runs to the bathroom like some bitch, as Billy would say. He locks the door behind him and curls into a ball on the floor as Nancy bangs on the door. She's talking to him but so are the shadows and it's all too much. He puts his hands over his ears and closes his eyes. He doesn't want to see, do, or hear anything anymore. He doesn't want to hurt anyone anymore. He doesn't want to do anything at all anymore.

"You know what you have to do." Jack's voice is whispering to him, the remnants of a dream but it sounds so real, so close. He can't help but obey.

Steve gets up slowly, the voices all around now muffled as the clear path before him widens. He walks over to the bathroom sink and opens the cabinet. He finds the spare razor blades and grabs one. It's cupped in his hand, away from view when the door bursts open and Billy's red, terrified face looks for his. His eyes lock onto Steve and in a sudden burst of emotion pulls Steve into a tight embrace.

"God, Steve, fuck. Don't do that to me." Billy tells him seriously, then after a few moments, "Tell me what's going on with you. Nancy and

the others can help.”

Those last words come out of Billy’s mouth tasting like acid. Every instinct in his body is telling him not to go to the others. Not to ask for help because they can’t, others never do, but this is Steve. This is his Steve, he has to. He has to do whatever it takes to make sure that he’s okay. To somehow make him right again. Make him *Steve* again.

“I-” Steve strangles out as Billy pulls back to stare at him, waiting for an answer. Steve’s next words are just as much of a shock to Billy, than to Steve who never thought that he would ever utter them. “I killed Jack.”

71. "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?"

It bursts out of him before he can stop himself. It's like a balloon that has continuously been blowing up for these past weeks, the inevitable burst always ready to happen at any moment. The moment never known but both dreaded and hoped for. A moment that is now. A moment that seems to stretch on forever. They're both stuck here in this moment, eyes locked on to each other's. One trying to distinguish, to hope and see in vain a lie, the other, a cold acceptance and horror at one's own faults. It's a stare that spells the end of something and yet the beginning of another.

Steve realizes with terrifying clarity that Billy now *knows*. He told him the truth he's been trying so helplessly to conceal and carry himself. He told him that he killed. That he killed Jack and Billy isn't saying anything. His grip on his shoulders in that cold bathroom is light now, like he took some of the pressure off, the only clear sign that Billy heard him. That he's processing the words and yet he says and does nothing. It scares Steve more than any burst of anger ever would. He can't stand the silence much longer and starts off saying to fill it, "Sweetheart—"

"What have you done to us?" Billy cuts him off quickly, coldly as his eyes look down to the blue tiled floor. His hands fall from Steve's shoulders and he repeats his words once again. "What have you done to us?"

"I—" Steve tries but he can't seem to find his voice. It's lost somewhere in the shadows that have gradually become more and more prominent. They swoop in, enclosing them all. Even Nancy who stands in the doorway, watching them both carefully and worriedly. She doesn't say anything as Billy backs away from Steve but he doesn't leave the bathroom. Instead he grabs the closest breakable thing in true Billy Hargrove fashion. In this case it's a glass Steve used to rinse his teeth out after brushing, and now Billy holds it up and throws it a millimeter past Steve's ear to the wall where it shatters in a thousand pieces. Nancy flinches but Steve makes no move to acknowledge the sudden noise. He only stares at Billy blankly, suddenly void of all emotions.

“Well, is there anything else that I should know, Harrington!?” Billy asks aggressively as he stares down Steve who continues to stare at him blankly. He doesn’t even muster up a response which seems to make Billy even angrier. He growls in frustration and pushes past Nancy, out of the bathroom and to only God knows where. Nancy watches him leave briefly but then all of her attention is back on Steve.

“Steve?” She asks quietly, a little afraid at Steve’s lack of emotion. It takes a couple of seconds but then he’s turning to her and giving her a tight lipped smile.

“Check on him?” Steve asks tightly.

“Are you s-”

“Please.”

Nancy nods her head and with one last lingering glance to Steve follows the trail of destruction Billy’s left in his wake. Steve listens to her run downstairs, then hears the front door bang shut behind her. He hears Billy’s engine start and he knows that Nancy is trying to talk to him, to persuade him to stay, to listen to reason but Steve knows already that it won’t work. If there’s one thing you can rely on when it comes to Billy Hargrove, it’s his inability to listen to reason.

“Okay.” Steve says to the seemingly empty room. His right hand opens and the razor falls to the ground with a clang. Blood drips from his hand where he gripped it. He takes a step forward, and then another, a blood trail follows him as he leaves the bathroom, to the hallway, then out the back door.

“Where have you been!?” Jonathan half yells as Nancy walks into the Buyers residence an hour later.

“At Steve’s.” She tells him and the rest of the audience.

“Is he okay?” Dustin asks quickly as he realizes that he’s not with her like she promised she would try to make happen. “Where is he? Oh God, did Billy kill him?”

“No! Of course not.” Nancy tells him quickly. “Let’s just stop talking

about killing, okay? For right now? Please?”

“Sure, Nancy.” Jonathan says sympathetically as his hand rubs across her arm, trying to calm her as best as he can.

“Actually, we can’t.” Hopper walks around the corner in the room, a grim expression on his face. Joyce is right next to him, white as a ghost.

“Mom? Mom are you okay?” Jonathan runs up to his mother as Will does the same. She waves them off with a forced smile but they don’t buy it.

Hopper looks at her sadly, then to the rest of the group says, “I’m sorry.”

“What? What is it? Another murder?” Maxine says, poking her head up. The boys and Eleven looks at the chief curiously. The adults try to keep the kids out of this stuff as best as they can but let’s be honest, if they kept them out of it completely they would go off somewhere and get themselves hurt. They’ve learned from those experiences. Now, they try to keep the kids in the loop as much as possible and give them jobs that don’t put them in mortal jeopardy. This way they feel like they’re doing something without the dying part which has been so prone to happen with the Upside Down situations in the past, and now in the present it seems.

“Yes.” Joyce says, taking the word out of Hopper’s mouth. Her face turns from sad to a hard expression as she does her best to be strong-for the kids. “It was your teacher. Oh, baby I’m so sorry.”

She says that last part to Will as she pulls him into a hug. It takes a few more minutes for it to sink in to the others who she’s talking about, but when it does, even Dustin can’t hold back the overwhelming sadness.

“Are you sure it was him? Are you sure it was Mr. Clarke?” One of the kids asks trying and hoping for it to be someone else, but it’s all in vain, because it was him. It really was.

Mr. Clarke has become the third victim.

72. "Oh Please, Just Come Here, Don't Fight With Me."

"You're still here." Billy states the obvious as he walks into the kitchen to find Steve sitting at the table, his hands laid on top. His posture is straight, normal, and there's no reaction to his words. He doesn't startle or respond, or even move. He simply continues to sit there staring with his back to Billy. It's a little unnerving but if he's being honest, everything about Steve has been a little unnerving as of late. He wanted to know so badly what that was- what is wrong with Steve and now he knows. Be careful of what you wish for, or hope for in this case. "I just came to get some stuff."

Billy's eyes fall from Steve's form down to the ground that he failed to really notice. What he sees strikes him from head to toe, that burning anger and rage that was simmering at the edge seems to rise up. Everyone always said that red was the color of anger, if that's true, then this dark crimson is an unstoppable rage. Billy didn't want to deal with this, he didn't want to lash out at Steve, and if he's being completely honest he was scared of what he might do. Of what he's capable of. After all, he did kill his father, didn't he? Fuck, no, he can't think about that right now.

"What the hell is this!?" Billy yells, the confrontation he was trying to hold off coming in at full force as he steps closer and closer to Steve who has still not moved an inch. He's ready to yell out more abuses to him as his hand automatically and unconsciously curls into a fist. He doesn't even know he's doing it, not really, he's too focused on the anger burning bright in his vision; igniting in the pit of his stomach and rising up in full force. But then, all of a sudden, like ice cold water being dumped on him, it stops. "Steve?"

Steve's hand is curled but the blood that is still seeping out is obvious and blinding. The blood on the floor, the blood on the table, Steve's hand that he's trying to hide. He's hurt, his hand is bleeding, a lot. It's those thoughts, the worry for Steve that really strangles out the flames of anger. He can't stand another person being hurt that he- He can't stand it. He just can't. And fuck, his heart is pounding loudly in his chest as he, almost without thought reaches out for the wounded limb.

Steve doesn't resist as he holds the bleeding hand in his own. He presses it deeply into the bottom of his shirt to try and stop the bleeding. He looks around for something sturdier and finds a dish cloth nearby. In quick succession he replaces the end of his shirt with the dish cloth, pushing down on the wound harshly, and yet Steve doesn't flinch. His eyes seem so lost and out there so much so that it scares Billy. It fucking scares him! This guy who killed- who did what he did and yet he's still worried? Still scared for him? What the fuck is wrong with him? Fuck, he doesn't understand any of this.

"Ow! Shit." Steve yells out as he reaches for his hand, trying to pull it out of Billy's grip but he won't let him. All of the sudden he's there with Billy, aware and not lost. His gaze isn't blank, it's real and *Steve*. He looks at him with a bit of anger but more confusion than anything as he slowly gives up fighting against the painful pressure on his hand. Instead he tenses and watches Billy as he removes the towel slightly to check and see if it's stopped bleeding. It hasn't.

"Shit. I need to get stitches, don't I?" Steve asks looking up at Billy.

"Stop whining. You'll be fine." Billy says and he means it. He's had enough little cuts to know that they all stop bleeding eventually. He then puts Steve's other hand over the towel to hold it into place. "Keep pressure on it. When it's done, bandage it up."

"Wait, where are you going?"

Billy's almost out of the kitchen, his heart beating painfully against his chest. Everything in him is telling him to go back, to make sure that he's going to be okay. To- Christ, to look after him, but he can't. He can't. Not when he's thinking about his arms around Jack's skinny body. Not when he's thinking about his pathetic last cough and wheezing that is long and hard, then the nothing. Not when he's thinking about the grave in the ground. He can't go back, not when the lingering of Jack's smell is still there, still everywhere.

"Away from you." Is Billy's blunt and painful reply.

"Billy..." Steve says his words a sharp knife to them both. "Oh please, just come here, don't fight with me. I'm sorry. Fuck, I'm so sorry. I was trying to-"

“Shut up! Just shut up! I don’t care, Steve, I don’t care.” Billy’s voice is loud and dangerous as he walks closer to Steve. His steps purposefully and harsh. His face is in Steve’s when he stops himself, when he closes his eyes briefly and wills all of that anger to slow down, if not to go away completely. “I- I’m staying at a friend’s. Don’t- Just don’t, Harrington.”

It’s cold and angry but Billy’s managed to hold most of that rage back as he backs away from Steve. He makes his way out of the house and into his car in record time. He drives fast and hard into town and to the diner. He walks quickly to the payphone and inserts a few coins. It’s only then as the ring tone sounds in his ear that he realizes he forgot to get all of his shit.

“Fuck.”

“Hello?”

“Shit, hi.” Billy says into the receiver.

“Who- Billy?” Nancy asks more confused than anything.

“Yeah it’s me. Look, Steve’s not doing so good and I’m going out of town for a few days. Just, can you check on him and make sure he hasn’t bled to death?”

“What-? Yeah, of course, but what’s-”

Billy hangs up the phone.

73. "Baby, Please Don't Look At Me Like That."

Steve wrinkles his nose as Billy hands him his cup while taking a sip of his own. "How can you drink it black? It's like gasoline."

Billy chuckles and snakes an arm around Steve, bringing him close and leaving a quick peck on his cheek. "Baby, please don't look at me like that. How can you drink it with half a cup of sugar and creamer? It's not even coffee anymore."

Steve sticks his tongue out at him and Billy can't resist that temptation. He leans in and kisses him good and proper. A lasting, heated kiss full of the bitterness of the coffee. It leaves Steve's head spinning and he can't help but spill a drop of the hot coffee on himself. He snaps back to reality almost instantly, leaning back from Billy and holding the cup away from him like it's a bowl of fire, which it kind of is. Billy's already laughing at him and Steve, an angry scowl on his face hits him lightly.

"Not fucking funny, Hargrove."

"It kind of is." Billy retorts but he's already grabbing both his and Steve's cups and putting them over onto the coffee table. He comes back to Steve who is trying with little success to wipe the coffee away. It's already soaked in and unfortunately Billy can see no other alternative but for Steve to take them off completely. Huh, what a shame, isn't it? They were such nice pants.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Steve asks bewildered as Billy goes to pull the offending garment down.

"What does it look like? It's soaked through. There's no choice but to take them off. Sorry." He's smirking as he says all of this and it only makes Steve the more horny if he's being completely honest but they've already gone two rounds this morning and he's supposed to be meeting Nancy and Jonathan in a bit to study. He really wishes he could blow it off but fuck, he needs to pass his exams, and so does Billy. He's been trying to get him to come all day yesterday with little success, maybe now he can tempt him...? It's worth a shot anyway.

"No. Hell, no, we have to study, remember?" Steve says quickly as he

stands, trying to strengthen his resolve.

Billy growls in frustration. "Come on, Steve, you're going to leave me here all day in this state?"

Now it's Steve's turn to smirk. "No. Look, you're coming with me. I said 'we', didn't I? Trust me, I'll make it worth your while."

Steve's in Billy's face now and instead of his usual timid lack of confidence he's suddenly pulling Billy by the reigns. His body shifting slightly as he not so obviously doesn't pull his pants up all the way. Billy really wants to lean in and give in to temptation. To kiss him senseless right there and then but fuck, Steve's right. Fuck. Not that he'll ever admit that though. Besides, Steve really stresses about this stuff, about his dad. What he'll say and do if he doesn't get into a good collage. Billy can't even count on all his fingers the number of times they've fucked hard and fast just so Steve would stop being a jittering mess about the whole thing.

"Fine." Billy says with great reluctance.

"Really?" Steve asks surprised, and yeah maybe Billy is too. "I mean, good. Okay."

"Great. But let's finish out coffee first, alright? I can't handle all of Nancy without it."

"Shut up. She's growing on you."

"Fuck you." Billy growls.

Steve only smirks as he grabs his cup of coffee and leans back into Billy's chest. Billy has his own cup in hand and Steve smiles. 'Love you, too.' He thinks.

"God, this coffee sucks." Billy says harshly as he looks into the diner's chipped mug full of the murky stuff.

Charlie smiles slightly but it's not really there as he takes a sip of his own. "I could have told you that."

"Then why did we come here?"

Any sense of happiness or light hearted banter leaves all of Charlie's features simultaneously. "It was Jack's favorite place."

There's a painful silence that elapses between them at this admission. Billy wants to say that Jack had better taste but the truth is he can see it, he can see why he would have loved this place. It's a diner that was defiantly built in the 50's or 60's with its retro booths intact and the juke box still glowing to life in the corner. Billy even saw a sign before he came in saying, 'Disco Tuesday's, 5 - 12.' He knows without even asking Charlie that Jack attended every single one, well that is until he couldn't anymore. He really did love this place, didn't he?

"So, how's- everything?" Billy tries for a more general approach but it seems to come out all wrong, he's never been good with small talk or talking in general.

Charlie smiles and it's so much like Jack's that Billy's heart clenches painfully. "Jack told me you were bad at small talk but I never thought it would be this bad."

Billy wants to lash out at him for that comment but he's able at the last second to reign it in. This isn't just anybody, this is Jack's little brother. So instead he says sarcastically, "Thanks."

"You know what I mean... So, why did you really want to see me?"

The star question, so soon already. "Why do you say that? Maybe I just wanted to check up on you."

"Ha." Is Charlie's response but it's light-hearted. "Come on, Jack talked about you all the time. I probably know you better than you think."

"Right." Billy says but the whole time in his head he's thinking, 'I will not hit this kid, I will not hit this kid.' Other than the smile, Charlie has Jack's wit too, which is probably not entirely a good thing, Billy thinks, especially not when it got Jack into so much trouble all the time.

"Fine." Billy says at last. "Look, Steve told me something about Jack

and I gotta ask you about it.”

“Oookay.” Charlie says slowly, but there’s a hint of fear and apprehension somewhere in his tone. “What is it?”

Billy opens his mouth to tell him but the words are harder to say than he thought. After a few moments with the air growing tenser between them he says, “I’m sorry.” That’s all that he can say, that’s all he can think to say. “I’m sorry, Charlie.”

And damn, he’s really not used to saying that word.

74. "I Will See You In The Morning."

"I love him, Nancy, I really, really fucking do." Steve says with reverence before yelping in pain as she presses a little too hard on his hand. "Shit!"

"Steve, first of all, I know Billy swears like there's no tomorrow but you don't have to. Second of all, why didn't you go after him? To try and explain what you meant. I think at this point everyone deserves an explanation." Nancy tells all of this to him with a caring but slightly angry demeanor as she presses a clean towel against the wound on Steve's hand. So far the blood has slowed down immensely but Steve still is looking a little too pale for Nancy's liking. Not to mention the vast amounts of drops of blood on the ground leading from the back door to the kitchen and on to the table. It looks more like a murder scene than anything else, let alone Steve's house. As soon as Nancy saw it she was hell bent on taking him to a hospital but he begged and pleaded so furiously that Nancy couldn't refuse in the end. Especially not when he said he would refuse any help at all if she tries to take him and he's her best friend, she's not going to let him bleed out. Also, yeah, she'll admit it, she's a little scared of what Billy Hargrove would do if she hurt Steve in some way, again. She's cringes at that last part, not having forgotten how she hurt him and that one time when Billy threatened her...

"I think it's stopped bleeding." Nancy says slowly as she takes the towel away and quickly puts a gauze pad over top from the first aid kit she found under the sink. As a general rule ever since the Upside Down came into all of their existences, everybody keeps a spare first aid kit laying around, always stocked full.

"Thanks, Nance." Steve says dejectedly as his mind still wanders to the angry young man who left and probably won't be back for some time. Maybe- No, he'll come back. Steve knows he will, if nothing else to get his cologne back. God, he spends so much money on that shit, not that Steve can judge with the amount he spends on hair product but still. Any old kind at the general store is fine, right? Well, at least he thinks so.

"You're welcome." Nancy says with an air of someone older and

wiser. "But do me a favor?"

She clips off the gauze she's wrapped around him and tapes it up as Steve asks, "What?"

"How should I put this? Figure it out. Between you and Billy, I mean, like seriously, you two are chaotic together, but you deserve to be happy, Steve."

"And you think he can make me happy?"

"I think you make him somewhat more of a man than he's ever been and I think he likes that a lot." Nancy tries to explain.

"That's not an answer." Steve says, his eyes narrowed.

"Doesn't matter what I think, I lost the right to give my opinion. Just be careful, okay?"

"Nancy you haven't-"

"Yes I have." She insists.

There's a moment of silence between them as Nancy packs away the first aid kit and places it back under the sink. She then comes back to the kitchen table and sits across from Steve. She gets straight to the point about another, maybe even more important matter. "The kids want you to come over."

Steve sighs and Nancy already has her finger up in his face saying, "No, Steve, no excuses this time. They haven't seen you in three weeks. Summer is almost over so buckle up and I'll drive you over."

"You have a car now?" Steve asks surprised.

"Jonathan loaned me his."

"Right."

"Alright, let's go." Nancy's standing up already but Steve doesn't make a move to follow her. "Let's. Go."

"Nancy, my hand, and everything with Billy..." Steve tries but Nancy's not buying it.

"No, no excuses, Dustin will kill me if I don't show up with you. Besides, they lost a friend, Steve. Mr. Clarke was their favorite teacher."

"Mr. Clarke? What do you mean lost him?"

Nancy's eyes fall slightly. "You don't know?"

"Know what?" Steve asks all the more anxious now. "Know what, Nancy?"

"Look, my brother was a free spirit. He lived in the last decade, but he wasn't all that great with thinking about others first." Charlie explains to Billy as they sit in the booth across from each other sipping the crappy coffee. "I think that's why he liked you so much. You both were pretty similar."

Billy glares at him but it doesn't dissuade Charlie from continuing on.

"Jack was pretty simple though, if he didn't like you then he would tell you that. If he liked you then he would make a move. He didn't wait around for things to happen, he made them happen. I always kind of admired that."

A shadow passes over Charlie's face and Billy feels a wave of guilt fill him almost completely. He wishes that he didn't have to be here and he wishes that he didn't have to tell Charlie this, but what other choice does he have? If it was his brother, he'd want to know, so, wouldn't Charlie? Wouldn't anyone?

"What I'm trying to say is that it doesn't surprise me. I actually I kind of thought maybe..." Charlie trails off. He's telling the truth, that Billy is sure of. When he finally got the courage to say the words, Charlie didn't even faze, not really. He just leaned back and it was like everything was clicking into place, like all he knew was confirmed to be true. It makes Billy slightly go ballistic inside but he doesn't let that show. He doesn't let that anger out, not when he

keeps reminding himself that this is Jack's little brother, his family, but then again Jack's the reason Steve is so messed up. Steve is such a pushover and always wanting to do the right thing. God, what the fuck was Jack thinking? He should have asked him if anyone else. Fuck.

"So you think it's some kind of ritual?" Steve asks Nancy carefully as he paces back and forth across the kitchen floor, fingers tightly holding onto the tendrils of his long hair in a frustrated grip.

"That's exactly what it looks like. Jonathan and I have been doing research and it's actually really interesting. Lovecraft believed in being able to open doors into other worlds, maybe he wasn't just a writer but a practitioner of some kind? Maybe he was like Eleven? Who knows? Either way, someone is copying his beliefs in what looks like a ritual that Lovecraft believed could open a door to another universe."

"What kind of universe? Cotton Candy land? This is ridiculous. Eleven and those government guys were all about science. This is fiction, this is--"

"Myth." Supplies Nancy. "But all myths have to start somewhere real, right?"

"Yeah maybe."

"Look, we can discuss this better with the others. We're ordering pizza and everything tonight, so come on let's go."

"No." Steve says to her a little forcefully. Nancy looks back at him, mouth opened at the ready to argue but Steve is quick to continue, "Not tonight. I'll come over first thing, promise. Hey, I'll even bring donuts from the diner."

"Steve--"

"Nancy. It's been a long day."

Steve looks so desperate and sad and pale that Nancy reluctantly agrees. "Fine, but if you're not at the Buyers by eight sharp I'm coming to find you and letting Dustin come along."

“Okay, okay, I get it.”

“I will see you in the morning.”

As soon as the front door shuts behind her, Steve leans back and lets out a breath he didn't even realize he was holding.

“Fuck. Billy, where the hell are you?”

75. "Don't Think Of Me Like That, Just Picture Me Leaving And Not Coming Back."

"You were so angry." Steve says quietly as he ducks his head against Billy's gaze. "I don't blame you but... I'm sorry, Billy. I shouldn't have-"

"I know." Billy cuts off gruffly as he thinks of how he left this house yesterday, upset and pissed. How he almost lost it and- and how he got too close to that monster he killed. Or he thought he killed, maybe he's the monster now. He shouldn't have gotten so angry, fuck, Steve must have been scared. Scared like he was. "Don't think of me like that, just picture me leaving and not coming back. Not turning into- I shouldn't have got so pissed like that."

"What are you talking about?" Steve asks confused as he's thrown from his previous thought process. He was apologizing for what he did. How he hurt Billy by helping to end his best friend's life, not Billy apologizing to him. For what? Getting angry? He deserves his wrath, hell he probably should have hurt him a hell of a lot more. He deserves it. He deserves everything.

"Just forget it. We have to talk."

"Okay."

Billy looks to Steve then turns to the fridge and opens it quickly. He grabs a beer and pops it open even though it's just past five in the morning. He got into town about half an hour again and hasn't slept yet, in fact he hasn't slept since he found out that Jack's death wasn't him succumbing to that disease, but by his- by Steve's hand. All in all, a beer is just what needs, a small step away from coffee but coffee takes too long to make and its effects aren't nearly as satisfactory as alcohol is.

"Look, I went back to California." Billy says after he finishes half the beer in record time.

"You did?" Steve asks surprised as he nervously fiddles with the bandage wrapped around his hand.

“I went to see Charlie and I told him.”

“What!?”

“Relax.” Billy says too calmly for Steve’s liking. Where’s the yelling? The screaming? The hurt? The pain that Jack promised would happen? “He wasn’t even surprised. I didn’t know Jack as well as him but fuck, everything he said was true. Jack didn’t think about anyone but himself half the time.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Steve asks now slightly angry. This is not how this is supposed to go.

“This isn’t your fault, Steve, you’re too good. Jack shouldn’t have asked you to help him. You’re too good to say no to anyone.”

“What?” Steve’s on his feet now in Billy’s face. “Why aren’t you angry!? I killed him! I killed him, Billy!”

“No you fucking didn’t. He killed himself. You just helped.” Billy takes another long sip of his beer.

“No, I killed him. He was too weak to drink it so I made him.”

“What?”

Steve is smiling wryly now as the shadows dance at the edge of his vision. He then nods his head and takes a small step back. “I really did kill him.”

Billy seems a little shocked but he doesn’t let it change his mind, instead he simply says again, “You’re too good.”

“What? How can you-”

The phones rings cutting them both off. “You going to get that?” Billy asks as he nods his head to the phone on the wall. Steve looks from Billy to the phone then back again. He shakes his head in frustration and confusion before going over to do just as Billy asked. He doesn’t understand any of this. Jack said that he hurt Billy beyond reproach and that if he knew he would hate him. That he should hate him. Maybe he does and Jack wasn’t wrong? Maybe he’s biting his

time? But that doesn't make sense. Billy doesn't think, he punches first and asks questions later. Does that mean then, that Jack was wrong? Or worse, that he lied? But why? How? No, he- *Billy's the one who is lying, Steve, he's waiting for his moment to strike. To hurt you far worse. Come on, just do it, you have to. You-*

"Steve?"

"Jonathan?"

"Thank God." Jonathan says on the other side of the line in a rushed voice. "You have to get over here, we've figure out. And it's- it's huge, Steve."

"What do you mean?" Steve asks confused as he pushes down his conflicting emotions and thoughts about the situation between him and Billy.

"These rituals and the murders. It all makes sense. You see- (*shit right.*) This line might not be secure, just come over. And hurry."

He hangs up and Steve is left wondering and even more confused but about something else, something far worse. He can feel it in his stomach, a rock, a weight that weighs him down. The certainty that something far worse is coming along. Worse than killing Jack, worse than even the monster Billy killed and is worried is starting to take over himself. Something awful.

"Who was it?" Billy asks as he locks eyes with Steve.

"Jonathan." Is Steve's simple answer.

"Well? What the hell did he want?"

"He needs us at his place. He said they figure it out."

"Figured what out?" Billy asks impatiently.

Steve hesitates for a few long seconds before saying, "Figured out what all those murders meant. He said they figured it all out."

Billy nods his head and heads for the front door, tossing his empty

bottle of beer in the trash on the way. Steve watches him walk out before looking down at his stomach. He lifts up his shirt slightly and stares at the mark that's already scarred over. His fingers trace along the lines as the shadows over take his vision completely. A deep anger and hatred rises within him.

They figured it out.

"You coming?" Billy yells from the other room.

Steve puts his shirt down as the shadows recede. He shakes his head out of the daze he fell into, a little unsure of what just happened. He must have just spaced out, right?

"Yeah!" Steve calls back as he rubs his stomach absentminded, not even realizing he's doing it. "I'm coming."

76. "This Is Your Home Now So Don't You Forget."

"I'm fucking fine, Steve, lay off." Billy says angrily as he staggers to the living room couch with Steve right beside him. Steve has his hands out and is trying to help steady Billy but Billy keeps waving him off and moving opposite of him which causes him to stagger even more. Thankfully the couch isn't too far from the front door and Billy is flopping down onto it in a matter of minutes, making Steve sigh in relief as he helps the reluctant teenager to take off his boots and jacket. Steve puts them off to the side and grabs the blanket hanging on the edge of the couch and pulls it over Billy. Billy doesn't even attempt to fight this as his eyes are fluttering closed and his consciousness is slipping under.

"F-fuck you." Billy mutters as he starts to drift.

"You're welcome." Is Steve's response as he rolls his eyes and pulls the blanket up more. They just got back from school where Billy kindly threw up in Ms. Wexler's plant barely into first period. Steve knew he wasn't feeling well when they woke up that morning but Billy wouldn't listen to him of course. Saying that he needs to get to school and that Steve should just go fuck himself which Steve paid no heed to, now completely used to Billy's coarse words and actions. Now here Billy lays, feverish and ill, once he's better Steve's going to have the biggest 'I told you so' ever conversation with him.

"Shut up." Billy says weakly, his eyes closed.

"Go to sleep, Billy." Steve tells him, his hand resting gently on his forehead than into his hair.

"Gotta go home..."

A painful clench squeezes at Steve's heart at these whispered words. *"This is your home now so don't you forget."* Steve never wants Billy to go back to that place. That was never a home for him, not once, but here, with him, he'll make sure that Billy knows what a real home is supposed to be. Sure, he hasn't had one for a long time but he still remembers what that warmth feels like. Them, together, here, he can feel some of that warmth again, and he'll do whatever it takes for Billy to feel it too. He deserves that much and so much more.

“Won’t.” Billy’s voice is barely above a whisper but Steve hears it all the same, causing him to lean in and kiss his warm cheek gently. Billy doesn’t move, he’s already sound asleep but Steve smiles all the same.

“Shit, I don’t have any Advil.”

“Oh my God! Steve, buddy, Billy didn’t murder you!” Dustin yells out in his true over dramatic fashion as he runs over to Steve and hugs him. It only lasts a few seconds before he realizes what he did and how unmanly it is. He pulls away by that time quickly and catches an amused and slightly angry look from Billy who stands next to Steve almost protectively.

Steve only laughs and says to Dustin, “Geez, I didn’t know you cared.”

“I- I don’t- I mean come on Steve it’s been weeks! I thought you were dead!”

“Dustin!” Lucas whines at him with a roll of his eyes.

It only makes Steve chuckles some more though. “I wasn’t feeling that great. Must have caught something.”

“Woah...” Dustin says taking a few large steps back. “It’s not contagious, is it?”

Before Steve can answer Nancy sticks her head into the living room from the kitchen and catches Steve’s eye. She smiles softly and says, “Good, you’re here.”

“Yeah, hey.” Steve says to her with a small wave.

“You better get in here. Both of you.”

Steve and Billy look briefly at each other before following her instructions and walking into the Buyer’s kitchen. The kids are quickly on their heels and soon the dining room is packed full with everyone. Hopper, Joyce, Nancy, and Jonathan all stand around as the kids take the seats at the table. Steve and Billy join the other adults and stand around it too. They both notice immediately the papers in various piles. Some have files marked, ‘sensitive’ another

has 'maps' written on it and a few others with names that neither Steve nor Billy recognize. In fact, Steve's not even sure it's English or a human language in fact if you ask Billy.

"What the hell." Steve states the obvious.

Hopper looks up to Steve and says, "You've missed quite a bit, son."

And wasn't that the understatement of the year.

"Easy, easy." Steve says to Billy as he tries to push him down as gently as possible. He slept for over eight hours and although his fever has lowered he still has one. As soon as he woke up he tried to get up and off the couch but Steve was quick to get there before he did.

"Let me go." Billy says a little angrily but he's too weak to really fight Steve and ends up laying back down.

"You still have a fever, Billy." Steve explains. "Just take it easy, okay? I'll make you some soup and then you can take some medicine."

"What...? No, I don't need no fucking medicine."

"Billy, Jesus! Don't fight me on this okay!?"

That's when Billy really looks at Steve and sees how worried he looks. How his eyes are tight together and his forehead crinkles under the pressure. How his mouth is in a permanent frown and his hands are curled together in fear. He seems so desperate, so worried which doesn't make sense because why anyone would be that worried about him, even if he is living with the guy, is beyond him. But he doesn't like the way Steve's face isn't easy, open, and honest like it usually is. He doesn't like that there's no usual smile and playfulness. He doesn't like the tense and worrisome atmosphere. In fact his chest kind of hurts from it, but then again maybe that's the illness? Either way he ends up nodding his head and saying, "fine."

Steve seems to sigh in some kind of relief and nods his head too. "Thank God." He's about to get up and go to get started on the soup but he's prevented by Billy's hand holding tightly onto his. He didn't even notice him grabbing on, too worried about his condition and the fever.

“Um, I- I... Uh...” Billy tries to find the words but it’s so damn difficult. Thankfully Steve seems to sense what he’s trying to say and smiles gently. With his other hand he strokes Billy’s hair and Billy can’t help but feel a warmth explode in his stomach from the contact.

“It’s okay. I know.”

77. "I Did It All For You."

Notes for the Chapter:

There's been a few flashback scenes lately and there will be a few more so I hope you all are liking them.
:) {And yes there is a reason for them.}

The water was warm at first as Steve was the one to turn it on but as soon as he was out of the bathroom, which took much convincing on Billy's part, he turns it up to a blasting, burning heat that overwhelms him. The bathroom soon fills with steam as the water cascades down his broken and bruised body. His chest feels heavier than ever with every breath that he takes. According to the doctor he won't be able to breathe easy for a few weeks, something to do with his lungs still recuperating. He also advised against showers as Billy's arm is in a sling for a week and the other in cast but slings can be removed and casts can be covered quite easily, the gross smell and feel of the hospital though? Not as easy, especially without a shower.

"Fuck." Billy hisses out as the water leaves a burning trail across the wounds that open again under the pressure. Blood then mixes with the gel shit they put on him to make the monitors stay attached to his chest, at his feet. It washes down and drifts into the drain. It hurts more than Billy will admit but it also feels fucking fantastic. He feels like he's been washed and scrubbed clean from the dirt of his hands. Of the business that took place in that house. All that blood... He can still hear the snap of his bones hitting solid flesh. It makes him clench his eyes shut as he dunks his head under the scalding water, a small part of him foolishly thinking that this will get those images out of his head. Make them go away for good.

"Billy? You okay in there?" Steve yells from the other side of the bathroom door. Billy would have thought or at the very least hoped that Steve wasn't hanging around but this is Steve and he can't exactly walk by himself yet. Everything hurts, everything takes effort now.

"Yeah!" Billy calls back to Steve but what he really wants to say is 'leave me alone' or 'give me some space,' maybe even 'I did it all for you.' His hands wipe the water away from his face and he turns carefully so that his back is to the water now as he pushes back those unsaid words that

linger. He reaches over for the soap and he almost loses his balance, just barely catching himself on the tiled wall. He takes the soap and starts to rub it through his hair but his heart still hammers in his chest long after and his hands shake for even more time after. It seems ridiculous that he should have a reaction like that to almost slipping in the shower, especially after everything that's happening. Everything he's witnessed, everything that he did, and yet he still gets a fearful reaction like that from almost slipping in the shower? What the fuck is wrong with him? He has to get better and why? Well, he's not really sure anymore but for the very least so that he can have a proper shower without someone loitering outside the door to see that he makes it safely through the short one he's having now. At the very least he has to get better for that, right?

He turns off the shower and very slowly gets out. He grabs a towel and wraps it around himself. He sits down quickly after that on the toilet as he tries to catch his breath. He breathes so heavily that if he didn't know his chest wasn't hurting he would think that his lung has collapsed again, which is a scary possibility if he ever does it. A terrifying thought the doctor kindly put in both him and Steve's heads. How nice of him, isn't it? Billy smiles bitterly at it as he breathes in and out desperately.

"You okay?" Steve asks again but this time he's not yelling as the shower is now off and words can be heard clearly between the closed door.

"Yeah, I'm-" Billy starts to say as he goes to grab his boxers off the shelf, but as soon as he tries to lean down and put them on he finds that his arms don't really want to work anymore. They feel so heavy, he feels so heavy. He could drift off right there and then if it wasn't for Steve's insistent voice on the other side of the door.

"Billy?" This time there's a hint of fear in Steve's voice as Billy hears him walk over and try to open the door. Billy locked it of course, not really thinking.

"Yeah! I-" He stops himself from saying he's fine, because he's not. He can't even put his own fucking underwear on. "Just get in here and help me, would you?"

"Yeah, yeah okay, Billy. Can you unlock the door?"

Billy looks down at his feet. He tries to put one down but it's like pudding

and he doesn't even bother putting any weight on it. "No."

He needs help but damn it if he'll ever say it. He's already more pitiful than he wants to admit, or add to.

"Just pick the lock." Billy says to Steve.

There's a pause of silence before Steve's timid voice replies, "I don't know how."

"What kind of 'King' doesn't know how to pick a lock?" Billy says and before he knows it he's laughing. A real genuine laugh. And Steve's laughing too.

Maybe that's the real miracle here.

"So it's some sick bastard who's doing this?" Billy asks a little angrily. Hopper nods his head and confirms it. Billy rubs his hand across his mouth. "Well, fuck me."

Nancy smirks and suppresses a pretty clever retort if you ask her.

"So what do we do?" Steve asks, the ever more level headed. "How do we stop this guy?"

"Good old fashioned police work." Hopper says with a smile as he pulls a file from under the table and places it on top.

"What's that?" Mike asks, confused.

"These are the reports of missing pets going back three months."

"How's that going to help?" Max chips in.

"Well, it's the best lead we have." Joyce explains. "Whoever is doing this started off with pets, maybe they started off with their own?"

"I don't know about that guys." Lucas says. "What about the murders?"

"I'll be working on the murder cases, you kids will work with the pets." Hopper tells him with a smile.

Everyone groans.

“What about us?” Nancy asks. “We are adults. We can help with the murder cases.”

“Maybe.” Hopper says.

Nancy crosses her arms and raises her eyebrow in defiance.

“Well,” Billy interrupts as he rubs his hands together. “This calls for some beer and pizza. You guys can do the homework and I’ll go on a supply run.”

“Hey, that’s not fair!” Dustin cuts in before Billy can leave.

“Oh, yeah?” Billy says as he get much closer to Dustin than Dustin would have liked. “Can you drive shithead?”

“No, but-”

“Then it’s settled. Back in thirty.”

The front door shuts behind him as Dustin fumes and pouts slightly. “He didn’t even ask what kind of pizza we wanted.”

Lucas pats him on the shoulder sympathetically.

78. "I'll Do My Best To Teach You To Fly."

Billy takes a deep breath as he sits in his car, hands on the wheel, and silence at last. He's alone and he can finally breathe. His hand still feels weak from the cast removal he had a few days ago but it will strengthen in time. Hell, Steve didn't even notice it was gone. That tells him all he needs to know about how he's doing. Billy thought it was just the shit with Jack but something's not right with him, something is wrong but he can't quite place his finger on it. And God, when did he become such an observant, caring, love sick girl? He hates this. It was supposed to be easier with Steve, it was for a time, now it's all complicated and his chest is full of emotions he never asked for. What the hell is he supposed to do? This- this isn't the Steve he fell for- No. No, he can't think like that. Not now, not... Not now.

"What the fuck, Steve?" Billy asks with not much heat behind it as they sit on the couch watching 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' for the hundredth time on Steve's VCR. Billy mostly ignores the movie now, as seen by the cigarette he smokes and the beer he drinks. His arm is around Steve who watches the movie intently even though he can probably recite every line by now. The movie was going as it usually was when suddenly Steve turned around and nipped at his bare shoulder. He isn't wearing a shirt as it has been getting warmer out lately and Steve is practically a furnace so he usually doesn't bother with the extra clothing now. Which has led to a few unexpected mishaps, not that either of them are really complaining.

"What?" Steve asks mischievously.

"Really? What?" Billy smirks at him as he puts his cigarette in the bottle of beer, only a drop left inside, extinguishing the cigarette in seconds. He doesn't like to smoke around Steve now because of the asthma but Steve insists its fine so he sneaks a few puffs here and there. Especially when he doesn't want to move to go outside because he's this comfy on the couch with arms full of Harrington whose warmth is more inviting than anything he's ever known.

"Come on, like you weren't thinking it."

Billy puts the beer bottle down behind him and grabs Steve roughly by the shoulders. He flips them over so that he's on top. Steve's smiling but it's not just lust, something else is there and it makes Billy's heart thud. "I'm always thinking about you." Its way cheesier than Billy meant to say and not exactly what he was trying to get at. What he meant was that he's always thinking about sex, but that's sort of a lie anyway and he doesn't go back on his words so he doesn't correct what he said. Besides Steve's smile turns blinding and that's everything right now.

"Me too." Steve says seriously and what the hell is Billy supposed to say to that? The answer? Nothing.

He leans down and kisses Steve hard. Steve in turns responds beautifully.

A horn honks loudly as Billy drives down the road slowly, lost in thought. A large pickup then speeds up and cuts him off. Stones go tumbling into Billy's window and one chips the glass. Billy's fully aware of the present now and an anger starts to fill in his veins as he realizes what is happening. Before either he or the other driver know it, he's sped way beyond the speed limit and turns aggressively cutting the pickup off. The guy in the truck slams on his brakes, stopping only an inch from Billy's Camaro. There's a breath, a silence before everything starts to spin out of control.

The guy from the truck, mid-thirties, and defiantly not a residence of Hawkins steps out of the monster of a vehicle and walks quickly to Billy. Billy for his part is already out of his car and walking just as aggressively to meet the guy on the rough road. Once they meet there's no words on Billy's part spoken, he simply lands a punch in the guy's face. The guy isn't no bitch though and is quick on Billy as well.

"You son of a bitch!" The guy yells. "You almost killed me!"

He's holding Billy up by the shirt, bleeding from his nose but it's nothing compared to Billy whose eye is already swelling shut. Billy is a big guy but he's just a teenager and this guy is bigger by far, and older. He's defiantly not compensating for anything from the truck he drives. Billy gets in a few hits but he's the one left lying on the side of the road bloody and struggling to get up as the guy gets in his vehicle and drives off, not before making sure that he backs into Billy's car

first of course. It wasn't a fair fight it seems, but if anyone was watching they might say that Billy let him win, that he wanted to lose, that he wanted to hurt- To feel some kind of pain. To feel something else, something other than this *hurt* left by another.

Steve's head lies on Billy's chest as they squeeze onto the couch in their afterglow. Billy's past the point of pushing him away after sex, instead letting Steve do whatever. He doesn't really care, why would he? Why should he, really? He would be smoking right now if it wasn't for the fact that he already has around Steve once today. He doesn't want to risk an asthma attack, no thank you, not again. The first time was scary enough. He shudders just thinking about it. He was completely useless and it was terrifying if he's honest. He thought Steve was dying.

"You know, you're not half bad, Hargrove." Steve says.

"Not half bad? If I recall you were moaning my name two minutes ago." Billy says matter of fact.

Steve hits him on the chest and Billy laughs. "Shut up, that's not what I meant. I just- with that cat earlier-"

"I gave him some milk, big deal."

"Billy?"

"What?"

"Just shut up, okay? Look, you're a good person. You can be, I think and I can teach you how to fly."

"Would you stop with that poetry shit and speak plainly already?" Billy says a little angrily but before Steve can answer Billy continues. "Look, just fuck, I have to go."

He gets up quickly, pushing Steve off of him and grabbing his pants.

"Billy..." Steve says with sad brown eyes. Billy purposely avoids them though as he gets dressed.

"I forgot to go on a beer run earlier. I'll be back in a few."

Billy resists the urge to kiss him, (even while angry he still wants to kiss him) and makes his way to the front door. Steve doesn't try to stop him. He doesn't bring this up again either.

Billy leans over the sink as it runs, the blood dripping down from his nose and mouth mixing with the water. It swirls down into the drain as Billy continues to splash water on his face, trying to wash all the blood away. It doesn't work so well as it keeps coming and coming. He should be in terrible pain right now, but at the moment everything is just numb. It's not until he reaches up and touches his eye that he feels the sting of a cut. It's only then that he looks up into the mirror and flinches. He never saw the worst of himself while in the hospital but he's sure it looked as bad as this. His left eye is swollen shut, his nose and lip puffy as blood continues to drip out from all over. The cut is above his eye and it's quite large. That asshole must have been wearing a ring or some shit. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Billy grabs the towel and presses it into the cut to try and stop the bleeding as he shows his teeth. He finds that a tooth has been knocked out and another chipped beyond repair. It must have dug into the inside of his lip causing all the blood. All in all his face is pretty fucked up and there's no way he can go back to the Buyers like this. Let alone grab some beer and pizza. Fuck.

"Hello?" It's Joyce who picks up the phone when Billy manages to finally dial the number.

"Hey, it's me. Billy." Billy says to her as he presses the towel to his nose, then back to his eye.

"Billy? Where are you? We thought you would be back by now?"

"Yeah, well, I got called into the garage. An emergency break down. Bosses car. I can't get away."

"Oh, well that's fine dear, I'll let Steve and the others know. We're meeting here tomorrow though. Will you be able to make it?"

"I'm not sure." Billy says as he holds in a hiss as he pushes on his eye a little too hard. "Probably not."

“Okay, well that’s fine. We have more than enough eyes on these reports but I think we might be up late. Steve might stay here tonight with the others, but did you want to talk to him? I can call him over?” Joyce says understandingly.

“No, no, ma’am. I’ll probably be at the garage late anyway. Tell him I’ll see him later.”

“Alright, take care.”

“Yeah.” Billy says before hanging up quickly.

He pulls the towel away and finds it pretty much soaked with blood. He sighs and throws it into the kitchen garbage before grabbing the kitchen towel. Steve’s defiantly going to kill him, if he even notices his face is rearranged that is.

Ah, fuck. His nose is starting to bleed again.

79. "Come On Baby, Make Me Fall In Love With You."

"You're bleeding." Steve states the obvious.

"Oh. You noticed." Billy responds. "But it's stopped actually."

Steve steps forward concerned but Billy automatically takes a step back and then another until he's at the fridge. He opens it and takes out a beer as per Billy usual. He takes a small sip and then hands it to Steve who has a much longer one. He sits across from Billy and reaches out. Billy moves his face away from the impending touch but Steve doesn't give up so easily. He puts his hand on Billy's jaw and moves his face this way and that to see all the damage. His eye is still pretty swollen but the cut has scabbed over just barely. His lips is puffy and his nose is bruised beyond belief. Black and blue all over. It makes Steve's stomach turn.

"Who did this?" Steve asks worriedly and a little angrily as his other hand clenches into a fist. If Billy's dad was still alive that would have been Steve's first and only guess. He would say that it was just Billy getting into a fight with another but this is bad. This is 'I got beaten to hell' bad. This wasn't no random fight. Besides, Billy's knuckles are barely red. He didn't get many hits in himself. Defiantly one, maybe two at the most but that's it. The rest were on his face, on his body.

"Some asshole I cut off." Billy says as honestly as he can, cutting around the corners of the truth only slightly.

"Who was it?" Steve persists.

"I don't know." Is Billy's first answer but seeing Steve's insolent face adds, "He's not from Hawkins."

"Billy..."

"Fucking forget my face. What about you?"

"What about me?" Steve asks confused.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Billy says none too gently.

Steve leans back. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I thought it was only Jack but there's something else going on, isn't there?"

Steve's silence speaks volumes. Billy shakes his head and scoffs. He drinks some more beer and then without warning throws it over Steve's head against the wall. It shatters and beer slides down the wall as pieces of glass splinter off in all directions. By some miracle they don't hit Steve and only one glides across Billy's hand. A small trickle of blood starts to fall and a tingle is felt in Steve's own still healing hand at the sight. He has a bandage still on his own cut but it's mostly closed now and the pain is less but looking at Billy's hand he can feel the sharpness of it again, and he can't help but laugh. It seems maddening at the time but God, how many beer bottles are going to be broken in his kitchen? There's been at least three in the past year alone, and they're only barely past halfway through it already. Jeez. How did things get so fucked up? Or maybe they have always been and they were just ignoring it. Steve doesn't know anymore. Neither does Billy.

"I can't do this anymore." Billy says suddenly and it's like a knife through Steve's heart as everything in him seems to stop.

"What do you mean?" Steve asks, an overwhelming fear taking hold.

"I talked to Hopper, he said I can stay at his cabin until I figure something out."

"You're leaving?"

Billy laughs. "Like this was ever anything more than temporary. Come on baby--"

"Make me fall in love with you. That's what you said the first night you were here, after we cleaned up that stupid dance. Don't you remember?"

Steve wants to say more, to tell Billy that he is the one making it temporary but he can't bring himself to repute him. To say anything more. Not now, not when his chest hurts so much. Not when he can

feel tears and a lump in his throat start to form, and rise. Billy looks at him almost regretfully and says, "Steve, I... Fuck I need space. So do you I think."

No, no I don't need any space, is what Steve wants to say but his mouth stays closed, and Billy's keeps moving.

"I mean, God, what do I know about being in a relationship? Or whatever the fuck this. It's been what? Six months?"

"Nine." Steve whispers but Billy either doesn't hear it or ignores it because he keeps speaking, never acknowledging it.

"According to Nancy we shouldn't be living together so soon."

"When did you talk to Nancy?" Steve asks looking up suddenly, a feeling similar to betrayal entering him. It tastes bitter in his mouth as anger latches onto him at the thought of Nancy going behind his back to talk to Billy, to make him *leave*.

"It doesn't matter." Billy looks guilty now.

"Yeah, it does. I thought you didn't even like her."

"I hate her for what she did to you, but even Joyce said-"

"Oh so now you're talking to everyone about us?"

"What? No, fuck no, I don't want anyone to- Fuck, they jumped me. Suddenly they're in my face talking to me and I wanted to tell them to fuck off but I- God, Steve, you've been messed up, and I don't know what to do. Maybe space is what you need, because I can't fucking breathe anymore when I'm with you. It used to be that you were the only one I could... This is stupid. What the hell am I even saying?"

"What the hell are you saying?" Steve asks, his voice cracking as tears start to form.

"Fuck, don't cry." Billy says, his voice pained as he looks up to see how upset Steve is. "I'm not- we're still- we're still us. I'm only staying at Hopper's. Alright?"

“Sure.”

Steve looks away as he tries to hold back the tears. He hears what Billy is saying, he really does. He knows that they're still together but- well- fuck! He knows that, but why does it hurt then? Why does it hurt so damn much? He knows he hasn't been right since Jack, he knows that but... Maybe he hasn't been paying attention that much. Maybe... But he can try better. He can be better. Why can't Billy give him another chance? Steve will do whatever it takes to make sure he can breathe around him again. He'll do better. He can. He can't just leave and expect him to be okay with it.

“Billy-” He doesn't get to plead with him or ask for another chance because when he looks up Billy is gone. Just like that, he's gone.
“Billy?”

He didn't even hear him go.

80. "I Guess We Can Make It All The Way."

"Nancy!" Steve yells loudly as he bangs on the front door. "Nancy! Naaanccccyyyy! Nancy, you BITCH!"

The door opens pretty quickly after that. It's Nancy of course, no makeup on and pajamas worn to perfection. She looks pissed although in Steve's drunken eyes he can't really tell. For all he knows she's smiling at him and that makes him laugh. He takes a sip of the bottle in his hands but it's quickly ripped away from him as Nancy shuts the front door behind her, walking onto her front yard. She pours the bottle out into the bush by her door and then gives it back. Not really realizing what she did Steve tries to take another sip and frowns when he finds it empty.

"Put it baccck!"

"Shhh." Nancy tells him in response. "My folks are sleeping."

"I don't have any. I don't have anyone. Not anymorrre!"

Nancy's eyes turn sympathetic at that. "That's not true. Why- what are you doing here, Steve? It's two in the morning. Did you drive here!?"

"No! I w-w- walked and drank." Steve tells her as he wobbles on his feet almost as if to prove his point.

"Steve... I've tried calling you. You never picked up."

"Why should I? You made Billy leave. Told him he needed space."

"I said you both might need some space from each other." Nancy corrects. "More importantly I told him that he needs to communicate with you. Besides, Joyce agreed with me."

"So?"

"Steve, I'm sorry."

"Fuck you!" Is Steve's response as he turns from her and starts to

walk away but he doesn't get far as the alcohol over powers him. He finds himself on his back in the damp grass in no time. He rolls over on his side and shuts his eyes against the dizziness that overtakes him. He hardly feels Nancy's hands on him, checking to see if he's okay. Soon though, he doesn't feel anything anymore, lost in a drunken unconscious.

"Oh God." Steve moans a few hours later just as the sun is rising and a jackhammer starts to pound in his head.

"Here." A voice says softly as a hand holds out some aspirin then a glass of water. Steve takes it gratefully and swallows it down quickly.

"Thanks Nance." Steve says and the voice chuckles as Steve's eyes adjust to the brightness.

"It's not Nancy."

Steve squints his eyes against the sun shining in and looks to the familiar face of Jonathan. Jonathan? What is he doing here? Especially when he is clearly in Nancy's room on her bed. He doesn't remember much from last night but a pissed off Nancy is defiantly an image still stuck to the inside of his eyelids. It's a hard picture to forget. So why isn't she here now? Yelling in his ear and making sure he regrets waking her up at two in the morning drunk as a skunk?

"Where is she?" Steve asks as he rubs his hand across his forehead, willing for the aspirin to kick in already.

"Church." Is Jonathan's simple reply. "It's Sunday, remember?"

Church? What the fuck? Oh. Oh, yeah. Nancy's folks like to pretend they're still the old fashioned bible thumpers this small town was built on by going to Church every so often. Although more often than not they skip the little service and compromise to a family Sunday dinner that's full of awkward silences and 'church' clothes that are far more uncomfortable than Steve would have ever thought. Being invited to a few of them himself when they were dating he got a firsthand account of the event, but looking back it feels like that was years ago instead of the almost year it actually is of the last time he went to one of those.

“Right. They still having those Sunday dinners?” Steve asks and Jonathan smiles like he’s in pain.

“Yeah. I’m invited.” He says it through gritted teeth, not commenting on how much he hates them. Jonathan is too kind for that and maybe a year ago Steve would have been too, but that was a year ago. A lot can happen in a year and Steve’s done being kind or nice.

“Man, I hated those.”

Jonathan doesn’t agree nor disagree, only looking at Steve with an expression of, ‘what can I do? I love her.’ Steve maybe can relate to that, thinking of all the things he’s put up from Billy because he loves him- cares, cares for him. That’s more accurate and far less complicated. He put up a lot because of how much he cares for Billy, but he couldn’t do the same? It all comes tumbling in with that thought, of how he got here, of why he got drunk. The look on Billy’s face when he said he was leaving, when he talked about space, and Steve couldn’t hold back the sadness. His heart felt like it was being twisted painfully in half. It was almost unbearable, the only thing keeping him sitting up straight was the promise that they weren’t over. That all Billy was doing was getting some space and why the hell do they need space again? Right, because he fucked up, because he’s not okay. It’s his fault. It’s all his fault.

“Nancy told me what happened.” Jonathan says cutting into the silence. He looks a little awkward but determined as he talks. “She told me what she said to Billy and what Billy said to you. And I love her- I love Nancy but... Look, only you and Billy know what you need. You shouldn’t listen to anyone else. I know we- Me and Nancy should have talked with you before we did what we did and got together, but we knew it was right for us. To be together, not to do what we did to you.”

That’s the longest Steve’s ever heard Jonathan talk and shit, he should talk more often. Steve can’t help but smile slightly. “I’m not angry anymore at you guys, but you’re right.”

Jonathan nods his head but he still looks pretty guilty about what he and Nancy did. He can’t really accept Steve’s forgiveness not when Steve has become a better friend than he thought would ever happen

but he doesn't say this. He doesn't want to overcomplicate things or ruin the friendship all three of them have managed to salvage and form.

"What are you going to do?" Jonathan asks after a few moments of silence.

"The obvious. Find that jackass and make him come back home with me." Steve can't help but laugh at his own words, like it will be that easy, like it's ever that easy with Billy.

"Steve?" Billy asks groggily after opening the cabin door to find said teenager in front of him. The cut on his eye is bandaged and his face has become less puffy, but he still looks pretty worse for wear. Not to mention that it's half past seven on a Sunday, his day off and yet he's awoken to knocking, and who the fuck would be coming here at this time? Unless Hopper forgot something, which is what he thought until he opened the door and saw who it really is.

"Yeah." Steve says a little nervously as he pushes past Billy and walks into the cabin. Billy's a little slow on the uptake just being woken up and all but he eventually closes the door and turns to Steve who looks all around the cabin anxiously.

"Why are you here at the ass crack of dawn?"

"Couldn't sleep."

Billy raises his eyebrow. "Seriously?"

"No, okay, of course not. Look, Billy just fucking come home already."

"It's been one night."

"So? Just come home." Steve says and this is not going as smoothly as he was planning in his head the whole way here. "I miss you."

Billy softens at those words but he doesn't let it show. "You need space. You're- Something's wrong with you and I-"

"I know." Steve admits and Billy was not expecting that. "I know I'm

not okay but I'm even less okay without you around."

Billy rubs his hands across his face tiredly and says, "Fuck."

"I'm sorry for the way I was, the way I am. Just come home and I'll change. I'll be better."

"Shit, just stop. Don't things like that, okay?" Billy's on his feet now and he's facing Steve. "Don't be some whiny bitch. That's not the Harrington I f- ...I don't know what to when I'm around you when you're like that. When you won't eat and when you just lay there. I don't know what to do."

His words become more stressed as he talks until the last ones are a desperate sound as he stares Steve in the eyes. He looks more at a loss and more scared than Steve's ever seen him. Steve quickly puts his arms around Billy and brings him into a tight warm hug. It takes Billy a long time before his own arms come up and hold Steve back. They never really did hugs, not proper ones. Mostly it's because Billy doesn't like them. He's never really gotten them before from anyone so it was strange and almost hostile the first time Steve hugged him. He felt trapped and uncomfortable more than anything. It was nothing like the warmth and security that Steve knows hugs can be and tried to explain to Billy, but now, with Steve wrapped around him Billy feels okay. Not amazing, but it's all so *Steve*. His smell, his body, and just *him*.

"I don't know what to do either." Steve admits. "But we can figure it out together, or something."

"Ever the romantic." Billy says as Steve buries his nose in his shoulder, his arms becoming more secure. "I guess we can make it all the way."

Steve smiles into Billy's shirt as Billy almost without thought leaves a small kiss on his neck, just below his jaw.

"Hell yeah we can."

81. "Turns Out We Don't Belong After All."

"I ordered the pizza." Steve says as he takes a seat on the couch beside Billy. He leans his head back onto Billy's shoulder, exhausted. His head has stopped feeling like someone has taken a hammer to it, but he still has that lingering tiredness that hangovers leave. That 'my eyes feel sunken in and I don't want to move' feeling. He also hadn't eaten all day from the nausea but now that it's passed he's starving, hence the pizza. Maybe he could have made something, or hell Billy could have made something- hahaha. Scratch that, but either way Steve has absolutely no food in his fridge, so pizza it is.

"Good. I'm fucking hungry. You got mushrooms, right?" Billy says as he stretches his arm out over Steve's shoulders.

"I was supposed to get mushrooms?"

Billy leans back to look at him, a hurt expression on his features. "Turns out we don't belong after all."

"Billy..."

"I'm just screwing with you." Billy assures. "But you know I hate mushrooms. What gives?"

"I don't know." Steve says honestly, then thinking better of it adds, "Sorry."

"Sure. Hey, just, don't lie to me. I'm not a fucking idiot."

Billy's arm isn't around Steve anymore.

"I'm sorry. I- Honestly I forgot."

And shit? Why does that kind of hurt? It's just mushrooms. It's just fucking mushrooms. Pull yourself together Hargrove, pull yourself to-fucking-gether. "You forgot?"

"Yeah." Steve says, his eyes a little glazed as that familiar fog overcomes him and figures in black dance out of the corners of his eyes. "Sorry."

"You already said that. Look just forget it."

"I love you."

"What?" Billy whips his head around and stares at Steve wide eyed and confused.

"I love you." Steve says again and Billy knows he's serious because his hand is on his cheek and his thumb is stroking up and down along his jaw. His eyes are no longer glazed, he's no longer in a fog. He's here and he's telling Billy that he loves him. He loves him. Him. Fucked up, killer, Billy Hargrove. He must be dreaming. After everything he's going to say that? "I haven't been okay, but I love you, I really fucking do. I want you to know that."

"Why are you saying this? Now?" Billy asks after a few moments of silence as he tries to wrap his head around those words and what's happening. All the while he does Steve continues to rub his thumb across his jaw as the warmth from his hand reaches into Billy. Reaches deep into him and grabs hold.

"Because I do. Because I want you to know that you're loved." Steve says honestly and suddenly there's tears in his eyes but neither Steve nor Billy can really place a finger on why. "I love you, Billy."

"How can you?" Billy can't help the words from leaving his lips. They burst out like an explosion, full of confusion instead of shrapnel and pain instead of explosive powder.

"How can I not?"

Billy doesn't know how to respond to that, he's still trying to wrap his head around the words 'I love you.' It's just as well because Steve wasn't really expecting a response. He simply smiles and leans in for a lingering kiss. When he pulls back Steve's smile becomes sad.

The shadows still dance.

"All the words are starting to jumble up now." Billy says to the small group scattered around him in Steve's living room the next day. Steve is next to him on the floor while Nancy and Jonathan sit on the couch with numerous files between them all. They've been looking at

the police reports of missing pets and other small crimes in Hawkins since the first one went missing and it's honestly getting them nowhere. They've been at this for hours, practically all day and it's already well past when the sun set. Billy's mind is pretty much fried and the others are not far behind him.

"I know what you mean." Steve agrees as Nancy bounces her leg nervously looking from page to page intently.

"It has to be in here somewhere. One of these is bound to give us a clue." Nancy says anxiously.

"Nancy, maybe it's just not here." Jonathan says gently, having dealt with a stressed out Nancy on more than this one occasion.

"It has to be. I mean- God. It's almost the end of August. What if we can't figure this out before the semester starts? We can't just leave, can we?"

Jonathan goes to answer before Billy beats him to it. "The semester?"

"Yes, college. The semester starts the first week of September, but of course you would want to be there a week ahead." Nancy says it like it's obvious but of course it's not for Billy. Why anyone would go to more school is beyond him. Besides it's not like he would ever have the grades or the money to get into one of those things. Sure, Steve has, but only on the condition that he becomes some bank investor or big shot lawyer, his dad's insistence. It would be on his dime after all, but Steve's expressed many times how he hates the thought of doing that. How bored he would be and how he could never make the grades that it would require. He was very careful not to mention the obvious, which is that Nancy wouldn't be around to help him, knowing how pissed Billy can get when he mentions things that she can do for him and he can't.

"So you guys have figured out what school you're going to?" Steve asks genuinely curious but also hoping to stop staring at these pages because Billy's right, all the words are starting to get jumbled.

Jonathan looks to Nancy, smiling a dumb love struck grin as she

answers, “Yeah, we’re going to the one in California. It’s big enough for everything I want to study and it’s not too far away for Jonathan.”

Steve smiles too but he soon loses it as Nancy asks, “What about you?”

Steve looks to Billy with a hesitating frown and Billy does his best to pretend this isn’t happening, but that’s impossible. Instead he says bluntly in answer for Steve, “He’s going in the city.”

“That’s great! I’m happy to hear that, Steve.”

“Actually,” Steve says carefully, “I haven’t decided yet, if I’m going for sure.”

“What?” Billy’s eyes are wide and confused as he turns his whole body to Steve. “What are you talking about? Becoming a ‘master of books’ is all you talk about.”

Steve would be embarrassed about Billy saying those things in front of others if it weren’t for the fact that this is such a serious conversation. “Billy, I...” He starts to say but doesn’t get far as his phone starts to ring. It takes him a couple of seconds before he gets up and walks over to answer it.

“Hello?”

The others watch him, worried for what this phone call might be. Another body? Another Demogorgon from the Upside Down? One of their own injured following a lead? Hopper in some chief of police gun battle? The government intervening and making things a million times worse? Anything is possible in this small town it seems, and that ignites the imagination like a blaze.

“Yeah, shit, yeah.” They all hear Steve say into the phone. “We’ll be right there.”

“Well?” Billy asks before anyone else can. “Who the fuck was it?”

Nancy doesn’t even glare at him for his coarse words, too afraid for what Steve is about to say, but he doesn’t look frightened. In fact

Steve looks more or less okay. His words though are still a little unsettling.

“Hopper found something. In the forest.”

82. "This Feels Different Than It Felt Before."

"This feels different than it felt before." Steve's words are a softness in the aftermath of something usually so rough and primal. Billy doesn't know how to respond to that so he stays silent. As he does so other thoughts start to pop into his head. Words. Words that were said to him. Words that mean something but that something he's not really sure. He's never been told these words, not really, and he's never felt them either. He's never known what they really mean, and he needs to know. He needs to know what Steve means. What he's really trying to tell him.

"Did you really mean what you said?" Billy asks it as casually as he can with Steve laying on his chest, both of them naked and sweating. Billy's hands play with Steve's hair without much thought as they both catch their breath from their previous activities. He can't help the words that come out, he just can't. His face still hurts from the beating he took yesterday but with Steve here and after what they did, it's lessened. The words he said earlier and did again before this started maybe helped it too, he's not really sure. The words are haunting in their own way and confusing as all living hell. He just needs to know. To know what they mean to Steve, to him even.

"Of course I do." Steve answers automatically. He turns his head slightly and looks up to meet Billy's eyes but Billy is purposely looking away. He looks so vulnerable like this. Naked, exposed and eyes half lidded with an almost childlike longing. There's a need for love, for security in those eyes and it makes Steve's heart ache to look at them like this. He wants to see happiness and contentment, not the other stuff. He wants to reach out to hold Billy, to make him understand whether it is with words or with actions that he does love him. That he means it.

Billy is still looking away, over to somewhere across the room when Steve pulls slightly out of his arms and turns to face him completely. He pushes himself up slightly so that they're face to face. Billy still won't look at him but Steve needs his eyes on him when he says this. He needs him to understand and accept the truth. The truth of them, of how he feels. He needs Billy to see and understand it. To feel it.

"Hey." Steve says gently as his hand moves Billy's face gently so that he's facing him. His hand cups his jaw then moves to his hair. He pushes back

a sweaty lock and rubs across Billy's scruffy face. He hasn't shaved in a few days and to be honest Steve is digging it, but now is not the time for that. Instead he rests his hand on Billy's cheek and makes sure his eyes are on his before he continues. "I love you. Even if it doesn't seem like it. Even if I'm not okay, I still love you."

Billy seems moved and touched beyond words, beyond even comprehension. He seems even more confused and lost, and it breaks Steve's heart even more. No one should be confused and lost when someone tells you that they love you. You shouldn't have a flash of pain across your features. Despite that, Steve doesn't say anything more for a long time, letting this sink in. Letting Billy come to some understanding of all of this, to know that it is real and it is happening. Eventually Billy's eyes that were looking away as he processed this information now find their way back to Steve. It takes a few more moments before he can say, "I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?"

Billy looks nervous and like he wants to bolt, but Steve is pushed up against him and his thumb rubs circles onto his cheek. A comfort he's never known was possible until he met Steve. It helps to keep him in place and makes him able to handle the tidal wave of humiliation as he answers, "I don't know what loving someone means. I don't- I don't know what it means when you say you love me. I- I don't get it."

Yeah, yeah that sound? That's Steve heart breaking. "Oh, sweetheart, all it means is that I care about you. I worry about you. My heart does this weird flip flop thing every time I'm around you, and it squeezes painfully in a good way. I- I'm sorry. I'm not- I love you. I don't know how else to put it."

Billy looks away, then back to Steve before he brings him close. His hand grips Steve's hair as Steve's does the same to the back of his neck in response. Their lips touch and move against each other in fiery heat. It's slow at first but soon turns heavier and bruising. Their hands race up and down each other trying to grip whatever is available and more importantly what is most pleasurable. They kiss until their lips are numb and their dicks are hard, rubbing aggressively against each other, trying to get off on one another. Before they can though, Billy pulls back and Steve groans, but Billy is smiling. (More smirking if you ask anyone but Steve knows it's

really a smile showing that he's happy and teasing him all in one. A favourite smile of Steve's if he's being honest.)

"Well, if that's love maybe I-"

"Hey! Don't you remember that fight in the hallway? You said it first." Steve cuts in, but he's smiling as he says it.

"Shut up. I didn't know what I was saying then. I just knew you were driving me crazy."

"Oh? Is that so? How about now? Do you know what you're saying now?"

Billy's smile grows wider before leaning in and kissing Steve for all that he's worth. It's the best answer that Steve knows he'll ever get.

And he's not complaining.

83. "Guess That You Were Just Expecting More, Come On, You Knew Me, What'd You Do That For?"

"What the hell is it?" Billy asks the obvious question as everyone crowds around the strange spectacle. They're in the middle of the woods, well not exactly in the middle, a few miles from Steve's house to be exact and they're all standing around what can only be described as some kind of alter. There's stones stacked upon each other in a weird circular fashion that face toward the setting of the sun. There's nothing obviously horrible about it, it's just strange and knowing what they all know they can't write it off as some freak piece of nature. So here they all are, trying to figure this out but by the look of fear on Joyce and Hopper's faces, they know more than they have said so far.

"Looks like an igloo, but like half formed with rocks." Mike says and Billy scoffs. Mike glares at him for that but doesn't get a chance to say anything as Hopper takes over the situation.

"Alright, everyone back to the house." Hopper announces.

"No, no way." Nancy cuts it before anyone else can make an adamant refusal. "You both know something. What is it?"

And yeah, the rest of them would like to know that too.

"Not here." Joyce says with a forced smile. "Let's go back to the house and talk about it."

"No." Steve cuts in. "Nancy's right, you know something and we deserve to know too."

She nor Hopper look convinced but Jonathan can tell his mom is cracking and steps in too. "Mom, what's going on?"

"We did find something." Joyce starts but Hopper cuts in with a short authoritative voice.

"Joyce." He says warningly.

"No, Jim, they're right they deserve to know." Joyce tells him, and he doesn't argue with her but his eyes tell a different story as she turns back to the others and starts to explain. "Remember when we told you- Or, well Jonathan figure it out that this had something to do with H.P Lovecraft and his stories? That there were similarities?"

There's a few nods of assent all around.

"Well," Continues Joyce, "we're sure now that it is exactly like Lovecraft's stories."

"Wait, what?" Billy asks confused and he's not the only one. Only Hopper who already knows everything and Jonathan who looks like he's starting to get it don't.

"I was right." Jonathan says before Joyce can say more.

"Right about what?" Mike, Lucas, and Dustin ask all at once.

"Someone is acting out Lovecraft's stories." Joyce says.

"Wait, this doesn't make any sense." Nancy cuts in. "If that's the case than this is just some crazy murderer."

"It's not as simple as that." Hopper tells her sternly and he suddenly looks ten years older. "I don't understand much of this Lovecraft guy, I'm sure Jonathan could explain it better but he believed in what he wrote. Back in the thirties and a group of friends tried to open a door. He said it didn't work but then he ends up dead not long after. We aren't one hundred percent sure, but with the increased Upside Down activity it must be connected. We've been having sightings of strange tracks and dark figures all throughout Hawkins. Descriptions that match the Demogorgon things."

"And all these sightings have been at places where pets went missing. You've read the reports." Joyce tells them.

"Yeah, we have but... How do you know it is part of the Lovecraft ritual murders?" Nancy asks.

"Let's go back to the house." Joyce tells her and she opens her mouth to ask the obvious but Joyce answers her questions before she can ask

it. "The only way to answer that question is to show you."

"Fuck." Is Billy's one word reaction as the pictures are spread out in front of them once they're back at the house.

"Mom, why did you keep this from us?" Jonathan asks clearly hurt.

"Oh, honey, I was scared." Joyce admits. She quickly looks to Hopper and says, "We both were. We didn't want to put any of you in danger."

"Woah!" Dustin says loudly as he sneaks a look at the pictures.

"Dustin!" Joyce says angrily.

"We told you to wait in the living room." Hopper supplies.

"Come on." Max says as the other kids follow Dustin's lead and squeeze their way into the group surrounding the kitchen table where all the photos lay. "We have a right to know."

"Okay, so this guy started with pets and now has moved onto people?" Nancy says as she looks at the symbols left in blood near the animal's bodies.

"Not just pets, dogs to be specific. There's been a few cats but it looks like hey just got in the way. It's mostly dogs."

"Right." Billy says as he looks from the photo to a dazed looking Steve. "You okay?"

Now everyone's looking at Steve but he's not moving and he's not answering Billy. Billy's eyes grow more concerned as he nudges Steve who quickly shakes out of it. He looks up to Billy a little confused with a strained smile. "Yeah." He tells him and why is Billy not buying it?

"Okay, okay." Nancy says. "These symbols, I'm assuming they have something to do with Lovecraft?"

"Yeah." Jonathan answers for his mom and Hopper. "Lovecraft called them hieroglyphics."

"Pictures that mean words." Billy says a little unsure.

"Yeah." Jonathan nods. "They are all over in his stories. There's no pictures of them in his books but rumour is that he made drawings. There's been a few examples of people who swore they've seen them. These ones, I know, they're from a book I read about him from the library. Maybe they're the real deal."

"Okay. Let me put this all together." Dustin says hands raised as he walks around the kitchen. "A guy is working with the Demogorgon's to kill dogs, now humans and to do what?"

Hopper and Joyce look grave as Jonathan's face pales at the realization but the others don't get it until Hopper clarifies for everyone. He takes a step forward and sighs. "To open a door to-

"Another world." Jonathan says looking from Hopper to Nancy. Then, before anyone can stop him he bolts from the house and runs out the front door. Nancy quickly follows him as a tense silence descends upon everyone.

"I'm disappointed in you, Steve." Jack's voice swims in Steve's head leaving a heavy weight that pulls him deeper and deeper.

Steve sighs. "Guess that you were just expecting more."

"Come on, you knew me, what'd you do that for?"

"Billy needs me. And he doesn't care about what I did. He's okay."

"For now." Jack says cryptically. "But then time comes and he isn't are you going to do what needs to be done?"

"What? Killing myself!? I'm not going to do that to him, or the kids."

Jack shakes his head with impatience. "If a door be open in blood it must be closed in blood."

"What are you saying?" Steve looks up into Jack's brown eyes fearfully.

Jack smiles but it's not a real one and puts his hand on Steve's shoulder. "I'm only trying to help you."

"No, no you're not. You're twisting everything! Billy was right. You shouldn't have asked me to help you and you shouldn't ask me to do anything now. Just go! Go away!"

Jack smiles ruefully. "Fine. But you know what you have to do."

"I don't have to do anything! We'll stop this guy! Okay!? No door is going to be opened! Nobody else is going to have to die!"

Jack's already gone, but his laughter echoes horribly in his absence.

"I won't let anyone else die. It's not going to happen."

84. "I Am Selfish To My Very Core."

"You're awfully quiet." Max says to Jane as she sits down next to her.

Jane glances at her nervously then to Hopper who disappears out of the living room into the kitchen where Joyce is. Once she's sure he's gone she turns to Max and says, "I saw it."

"Saw what?"

"What's on the other side of the door."

Max arches her eyebrow as Jane's lip quivers and fear fills all of her. She starts to shake and Max instinctively reaches out her hand. Jane grabs onto it tightly. Max does her best to reassure her by saying, "We'll stop it."

Jane shakes her head. "We can't do it alone. We need help."

"From who?"

Jane looks down and then up. She's about to say something when a loud screeching stops her. It's horrible and awful and so loud it makes everyone flinch as a shot of fear and adrenaline enters everyone. Nancy and Jonathan rush back into the house as everyone makes their way into the living room, checking to see that everyone else is alright, that no one is hurt. Everyone is and inside, and that's good, that's really good because that noise isn't human. It sounds beyond this world and it's scary as hell because whatever this is, what if it's starting? What if the door is opening or already has opened? What if something has come through?

"What the hell was that?" Dustin asks the obvious but before anyone can even attempt an answer a human scream pierces through the walls and into everyone's ears. It's full of pain and the worst kind of fear. Someone is out there, someone is with that thing and they are totally defenseless to whatever it is.

"Alright." Hopper says taking charge of the situation. "Joyce and Nancy you stay here with the kids. Boys you're with me."

"No, no, hell no I'm coming too." Nancy says taking a step forward.

"No." Hopper says with a voice that says no argument but when has Nancy ever listened to anyone? She opens her mouth to do just as his tone said not to but Hopper is already speaking again. "I need someone here who can protect them. Alright?"

Nancy can't argue with that so she simply says, "Fine, but I'm going to need a weapon."

"You can have the rifle, deal?"

Nancy smiles but the little moment is short lived as the screaming continues even more viciously than before.

"Alright, let's gear up."

"Billy?" Steve calls out as he looks in the fridge for a beer. He swears he just got a couple six packs yesterday but now as he looks inside they're not there.

"What?" Billy yells back.

Steve closes the fridge and walks into the living room where Billy leans back in the couch and watches the game. The bruises have faded to a yellow and he's been doing better at walking on his own since he got out of the hospital but Steve is still making sure he takes it easy, which includes going into the kitchen for them both and getting beer or other stuff when needed.

"Where's all the beer?" Steve asks and Billy's hand stops fiddling with the cigarette.

"I drank it." Is Billy's simple response as he does his best to avoid Steve's eyes.

"Why?"

Billy gets up suddenly and walks past Steve quickly, probably to go out and smoke, but before he gets out the door he throws words back behind him to Steve.

"What can I say, Steve? I am selfish to my very core."

"I still say splitting up is the worst possible thing we could have done." Billy says non-to-happy as he walks along side Steve is the darkened forest. Steve holds a flashlight but compared to the overpowering trees and cloudy sky it's pretty useless. It's better than nothing Billy supposes but still.

"Yeah, well you're not the chief of police are you?" Steve replies as he uses his bat to move the branches out of their way.

Billy scoffs. "Whatever."

"You should be doing this."

"You're doing great." There's sarcasm in Billy's tone making Steve roll his eyes.

"Sure. You just want me at the front so whatever is out there can attack me first."

"Ah, you've figured it out. Good for you." Billy lies. The truth is he wants to be at the back to cover Steve, to watch his back. To make sure nothing is coming at him.

"Still, you're the one with the big knife."

"It's a machete."

"Where the hell did you get a machete anyway?" Steve asks looking back for half a second with raised eyebrows.

"Long story." Billy answers. "But if you really want to know after that thing at the Wheeler's I knew a little pic stick wasn't going to cut it."

"Fair enough."

They lapse into an uneasy silence after that, neither of them really sure what to say, both of them tense and nervous all over. The fear is almost paralyzing. Out in the woods in the middle of the night with an unknown beast out there from an unknown world? Anyone would be scared out of their wits and no matter how tough Billy or Steve is,

no matter all the shit they've been through they are still really fucking scared.

"Shit what was that?" Steve asks terrified as he sees a dark shape flash across his vision. He stops abruptly and Billy bumps into him slightly as he readies his machete. He places a hand on Steve's chest and pushes him back slightly behind him as he studies the darkened forest for any threat. There's no sounds, not even a cricket or a damn squirrel. It's so unnaturally silent that it makes both Billy and Steve shiver. Goosebumps fly across their skin but it's not from the cold, in fact it's a pretty warm August night, but because of something that's there that they can't quite see. Something horrible and awful that's just out of sight.

"Steve watch out!"

85. "I'm So Damn Scared Of Dying Without You."

"Billy! Billy! Come on, Billy! Wake up! Wake up!" Steve yells in desperation as he tugs at Billy's shirt trying to rouse him but it's no use. Billy lays there on his back unconscious and bloody. His face is still a bad shade of purple from the fight he got into a few day ago but now to accompany that and the cut above his eye that's scabbed over and on its way to healing, is a deep bright slash across his chest. It starts at his arm and slashes across his chest to the bottom of his neck, like it's trying to climb it, to reach to something more vulnerable but Billy got out of the way just in time. It's stopped short and it can only bleed. It is damage, but it is curable damage, healable damage. It's not fatal and that's what keeps Steve from not collapsing there and now from his own wound across his leg. Similar to Billy's, it's tried to climb to something more vital starting from his ankle and stopping at his knee thankfully as Steve too got out of the way in time. "God damn it, Billy! Wake up!"

"Sorry, Steve but he won't."

Steve freezes. The hair on his arms and legs stands up to attention as goosebumps scatter all over. A startling fear creeps into every bone as that voice taunts him by being just out of reach. It doesn't sound like it's in his head this time. No, now it's here, right in front of him, or well, behind him. Fuck. He doesn't want to turn around, he would give anything to not have to turn around, but he has to. He knows he has to. It tugs at the edge of his mind and he finds himself doing just that, but not before grabbing Billy's machete (his own weapon being flung across the forest floor) to do so.

"Now, now, Steve. There's no need for that. You and I are old friends." Jack is in front of him and he's here. He's right here. My God, he's so real. He's so genuine, but that's impossible because Jack is dead. He is. Steve made sure of it. Jack smiles just then, like he can read Steve's thoughts still even though he's clearly not in his mind anymore from what Steve can feel deep in his bones. It's eerie, horribly unsettling, and he just wants it to stop. He just wants to go back to him and Billy sitting on that cliff out in the open, drinking beer and being giddy after sex. He wants to be baking in his kitchen

and trying to wave Billy away from eating his yet unfinished products. He wants to go back to the easy banter and secretive smiles that no one else knows what they mean but them. He just wants to go back to better times without monsters and worlds colliding. He just- He wants to see Billy happy again. One last time before it's over. He wants that more than anything.

Steve closes his eyes and readies himself for the final death blow but a chilling laugh from Jack makes him stop dead. He opens his eyes confused as Jack walks in front of him back and forth, all the while staying in his field of vision. He doesn't take a step toward Billy which is good for him because if he tried Steve would do whatever it takes to stop him, even though he knows that he's no match against Jack. He never will be, not ever.

"Steve, I'm not going to kill you." Jack smiles. "We need you."

"What? I have no idea what you're saying." Steve says disgusted and even more confused.

"You will. You'll see. I can show you. Come here and I will."

"Why would I want that- want whatever it is you're going to show me?"

"Because if you do, I'll let you and lover boy go. You can see him happy one last time." Jack says and he's smiling like he's doing Steve a favour.

"Fine." Steve says because what other option does he have? At least this way they can get out of here and get help. He can tell the others what's going on, that it's Jack who is doing this, who is helping the Demogorgon's and trying to open a door. Somehow he didn't die in California and he's the one doing this. They won't second guess him, no one in their group second guesses anything crazy these days. Because crazy is sane now and vice versa. After they know, they can take Jack out together and fix this. They'll stop the door from opening once and for all.

Steve steps forward as Jack holds out his hands. Hesitantly, but out of his own choice, whether it is his own complete volition or not,

Steve grasps Jack's hands. A shock goes through him and his eyes roll back into his head.

"Steve?" Billy asks as he blinks his eyes open from being unconscious for a few hours. He finds himself laying on the forest floor. A flashlight is on the ground next to him, pointing towards Steve's back. He knows it's him because how could he not? "Steve? What happened?"

Steve turns with a worried expression and crawls over quickly to his side. "Billy. I'm so damn scared of dying without you. Don't do that again."

"Do what?" Billy asks confused. He tries to think about what Steve is talking about but it's so blurry and his head hurts.

"Take it easy. You got knocked out by a Demogorgon."

"I did?"

"Yeah, don't worry though, I hit it and it ran away." Steve supplies with a smile that is slightly out of context to the situation, but Billy's head hurts and he's seeing double so he doesn't really catch on. Instead he reaches down to his chest and feels a deep rip through his jacket and shirt, otherwise there's no other damage, only lingering ache that vanishes as soon as he registers it.

"Yeah, it took a swipe at you. Luckily it didn't even leave a scratch." Steve tells him happily.

"What about you? Are you okay?" Billy asks concerned as his eyes scrunch up and his hands start to pat Steve down looking for any injuries.

"I'm fine." Steve reassures. "But we should get back to the others."

"Right. Right."

"Here, let me help you up."

Steve grabs Billy's hand and pulls him to his feet. Billy leans against Steve as he shakily takes a step forward back where they came. Steve

wraps his arms around him and steadies him as they continue walking. Steve doesn't go to pick up his bat and Billy is too out of it to notice. Instead Steve continues carrying the machete and flashlight as they walk out of the clearing in the forest where they encountered the beast. Just before they're gone completely though Steve looks back to the spot where it all happened and smiles. His eyes are not his own, but only for a second, and then he's looking forward again and Billy is thanking his lucky stars that they're both okay.

86. "Don't Lie, I Know We're Fixing To Die."

"What is this person supposed to be like? How are we supposed to find him?" Asks Nancy as she looks from Joyce's face to Hopper's. Billy watches her and waits for an answer from the two. It's a good question, the only one that really matters because it's the only way they can stop this. It's the only physical, tangible lead that can be seen, touched, and found. The psychic kid, Jane keeps saying that they can't do it, that it can't be stopped yet. She says the door has to be opened so that it can be closed. A bunch of crazy if you ask Billy. He can't believe he's saying it but he's with Nancy on this one. They have to find this guy.

"I'll be right back." Steve whispers to Billy. Nobody takes much notice of the exchange as they're at the far edges of the group, and Nancy is having a pretty heated discussion with Hopper. Everyone is jumping in now and giving their opinions. How the blood they found out in the forest is some kind of sign or another dead body, how the Demogorgon he and Steve encountered means something entirely different. Dustin keeps saying it's smart and Will is trying to quietly tell them all that there is a leader. Someone who's giving the orders. It's all a mess really and so no one notices as Billy nods his head to Steve in acknowledgment and Steve slipping out of the room. He doesn't go to the bathroom like Billy assumes, instead he slips out the back door and no one stops him, because no one knows.

"What do you suggest we do?" Nancy asks Hopper, annoyed. "Sit around and wait for more monsters to come through?"

"Of course not." Joyce steps in. "Jane and I are going to work on an angle for if it comes to that. Mike, Jonathan, and Will, you guys can help. The rest of you will help Hopper with finding this guy. Don't worry, it will all be alright. Kids, you can do research." Everyone groans at this but Joyce only smiles slightly.

It's then that Billy cuts in, a grim expression on his face. "Don't lie, I know we're fixing to die. We all know it."

"Billy, it's not going to happen." Hopper says sternly but Billy only rolls his eyes.

There's a few moments of tense silence before Joyce attempts a smile and gives him his assignment. "Billy, you and Steve- Where's Steve?"

"Hitting the head." Billy supplies. "What do you want us to do?"

"You both should stay back. If you got hurt once before then-"

"No. Hell, no." Billy cuts in as he takes a step forward, then realizing who he's talking to drops his head slightly but he doesn't give up his ground. "Ma'am, we're not sitting out this fight. What do you need us to do?"

Joyce nods her head in acceptance as Hopper starts talking. "We need you boys to do a patrol of town. Checking houses near the forest mostly, but if you see anything you radio us before you go after it. Oh, and take some wheels."

Billy nods his head and speaks for Steve and himself by answering, "Fine. We can do that."

"What about me?" Nancy asks looking to Hopper.

"I need you to follow up some leads with me." Hopper tells her. "Leg work. If you're interested."

Nancy smiles. "Sure."

Jonathan leans over to Billy as her and Hopper discuss their plan and whispers, "Nancy would make a good cop if she didn't have her sights set on a degree."

"Yeah, well, she certainly abides by the rules doesn't she?" Billy answers.

Jonathan smiles in a dreamy, 'I'm in love with her' kind of way and says, "Yeah."

"Alright." Hopper says after a few minutes bringing everyone out of their own individual conversations to come to attention to him. Billy listens half heartily as he looks around to see if Steve snuck in somewhere and just got talking with someone else but no matter where he looks in the kitchen Billy can't find him. He knows that he's

probably just having a little more time on the john, or needed some fresh air but he's worried. His heart clutches in fear and his hands become sweaty. Ever since they came back Billy was a little nervous, he thought it was just from being knocked out and lingering ache but- shit, it was Steve.

Where is he? Where...? Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Billy needs to go find him but before he can Hopper's words strike a chord within him and he's frozen. He's stuck in a never ending nightmare. No. No. This can't be happening. No, not Steve, not Steve. Billy's eyes turn to Hopper's and he wills him with everything he's got to just shut up, or to say he's made a mistake. That he got the wrong information, but he hasn't. The way Jonathan is looking at him intently Billy knows that he gave him this information from this Lovecraft guy, from the books he's a geek over. And this is real, this is really fucking real.

"The guy were looking for will keep to himself." Hopper says to them all. "Look for someone who has recently withdrawn from others. He would have been having nightmares and possibly visions. Although we won't see what he sees, as Jonathan has said he will zone out. Lose time and be out of it more or less. He probably won't do much, these murders and disappearing pets would have taken a lot of work. Expect him to be tired most of the time and as Jonathan has said he might not even be know he's doing this."

"Wait, what?" Lucas asks surprised.

"It's like me." Will speaks up and everyone is looking at him. "The thing was controlling me, using me as a spy."

"Oh, baby." Joyce says with anguish as she knows where his train of thought is going. "It's not you. When one of the murders was happening you were with us. All of us were here together watching Ghostbusters after the meeting we had. Remember?"

Will looks relived as he starts to remember.

"Well thank God." Dustin says loudly with a sigh of relief. "Well at least we know it's not one of us. Except... Steve wasn't with us but he-"

“Billy?” Nancy asks as Billy’s face grows a scary shade of white. He looks up to Nancy and then to the others. The adults start to have a horrifying realization that Billy has already come to. He doesn’t stop to see them figure it all out as he is already out of the kitchen and running to the bathroom. No ones in there. Steve’s not in there. Shit. Billy looks in the bedrooms, then the living room and any other rooms in the house as Hopper starts trailing after him with a grim expression on his face.

“Son, what do you know?” Hopper asks but he already knows the answer to that question, so does everyone else. Billy doesn’t even glance at him, he simply walks out of the house. He looks all over the yard, skimming his eyes for any sign of Steve but he’s nowhere in sight. He’s nowhere. Nowhere at all.

The fear chokes him alive until it all comes out in one sound, one name. “STEVE!?”

87. "I'll Smile And Pretend And Won't Show To The Crowd."

"No! No, it's not him." Billy persists as him, Hopper, and Nancy walk into Steve's house. Hopper has his hand on his gun and Nancy is looking a little too nervous for Billy's liking while holding a pocket knife. Billy wouldn't let her take the rifle, in fact he didn't want anyone to come with him. He was going to find Steve himself, but they insisted, or well Hopper did and he was- still is carrying a firearm at the time and now. So here they are holding hands across the bridge together. "Steve!?"

"Steve!?" Nancy tries but it's no use, the house is empty. All of them can feel that in their bones but they still need to search it if only to be sure, and to find evidence. Most of everyone is on Billy's side that Steve doesn't know what he's doing- if it is him, they haven't found definite proof yet, it's only really a suspicion. For now.

"I'll take the basement." Billy says glaring at the both of them. He's still pissed that they're treating Steve like some- well like a murderer. He's not, not really. He's still Steve. He's not capable of it. Not cold blooded murder. Hell, Nancy should be the first to back him up on this but she's all 'open-mind' and 'evidence before conclusion.' Like, yes, thanks Nancy Drew but you say you care about Steve. Fucking show it for once.

"Steve?" Billy asks as he flips the switch to the basement and walks carefully down the creaky stairs. He looks around carefully for any sign of Steve but there's no one. All there are is a bunch of boxes in the small room. Old stuff mostly it seems, but there's a few newer boxes, one for a new telephone. Huh, Billy thought that phone was new but he wasn't one hundred percent about it until now.

"Anything?" Hopper calls from the top of the stairs.

"No!" Billy shouts back. "I told you there wouldn't be... Fuck."

Hidden under the stairs is bottles, old glass jar bottles filled with something dark and red. No one would notice them if they weren't kneel down and looking underneath like Billy is doing right now. It's

not like they're filled to the brim there's only just some in there but there's dozens of them. Small old glass jars stacked and stacked upon each other. What the fuck?

"Holy shit." Nancy says from beside him, and when did she get here?

"I was afraid of this." Hopper says kneeling down to peer up into the little corner. He takes out a flashlight and points it to the jars to get a better look.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck." Billy says as he stands and starts to pace back and forth as he wrings his hands together. "We have to find Steve."

"We will." Hopper says to him "Don't worry we'll get him."

"Get him?" Billy asks on the edge of anger. "He could be hurt or worse. He obviously didn't know he was doing this. It's like Will said, this thing is taking control of him."

"Maybe." Nancy concedes and Billy's face turns disgusted as he glares at her.

"Maybe?" Billy says, pissed. "You know Steve, or at least you say you do. He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Well, that's not entirely true is it?"

"What the fuck are you trying to say!?"

Hopper steps in-between the two of them, pushing Billy back as Nancy looks down guiltily. She quickly reaches out to Billy but he already has his back turned to her. That doesn't stop her though from saying, "I'm sorry. All I mean is, we don't know for sure. Of course he wouldn't do this if he was in his right mind."

"His right mind? He's being controlled, or something." Billy says but even he knows how ridiculous it sound, but then again he never saw what that thing did to Will, Nancy has. First hand.

"Of course. You're right." Nancy agrees and Billy's eyes grow skeptical at that so she continues. "Will did- He was controlled too. Not to the same extent as Steve, obviously, but that's most likely

what's happening.”

“Okay, fine. How did you get it out of Will?”

Nancy's face turns grim but before she can answer Hopper says seriously, “We have to find him first, but it might be too late.”

“What the fu-”

“Look, we can talk about this later. Right now we have to get back to the house. We can figure something out there, but don't freak the kids out.”

Billy wants to argue but he knows that Hopper is probably right so he simply says sarcastically, “I'll smile and pretend and won't show to the crowd. But finding Steve is the first priority.” At Hopper's nod in agreement Billy follows him and Nancy out of the house and into the Hopper's car.

“What the hell is going on?” Billy asks with wide eyes as they pull onto the Byer's property. There's cars and vans, and trucks everywhere. It's like suddenly in a matter of hours the kids overtook the adults and decided to throw a kegger.

“They're here.” Hopper says with a grim expression.

“Who's here?” Nancy asks for both her and Billy.

Hopper looks to them both and says carefully, “Our plan B.”

“Plan B? We haven't even tried plan A yet! We have to find, Steve.” Billy persists angrily. “And if you're not going to help me then bye I guess.”

“No, Billy, wait.” Nancy says as she grabs his arm to prevent him from getting out. “We did try plan A. Steve's gone. Whatever is controlling him probably knows were on to him. That's why he left. And...”

“And what?” Billy asks at the end of his patience.

“And we think he's about to open the door. We think those murders

were-”

“Beta testing.” Supplies Nancy. “But he’s figured out the real deal.”

“How do you know that for sure?”

“The rocks, in the forest. It’s an altar. According to Jonathan that’s where this ritual has to happen.”

“Basically you’re spitting dirt.” Billy shakes his head. “Unbelievable. I don’t need you permission or your help. I’ll find Steve on my own since I’m the only one who gives a shit about him.”

Nancy goes to argue but Billy is already out of Hopper’s vehicle and making his way to his own but he doesn’t get far. A girl stops in front of him. With dark eyes and a cynical smile Billy recognizes her almost immediately. “Kali? What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I called her.” Jane says as she walks out from behind one of the cars. “She found the others.”

“Others?”

Suddenly there are people everywhere coming out from behind the vehicles. Mostly young people in all different shapes and sizes. There must be almost a dozen of them. They walk closer to Jane and Kali, and there’s something else Billy notices about them. They all have that same look in their eye as Jane and Kali, as himself. Its pain and it’s a bad memory that never fades. It plays out in front of your eyes, influencing every decision, every movement is touched by that memory. But unlike him, they all have something on their arms. As they get closer he sees it far more clearly until it’s distinguishable.

“Billy, meet numbers one to seven, nine, and ten.”

“Hey! We’re people too, sister!”

“Shut up, Jake!”

88. "No, I Won't Be The Damnedest Bit Fucking Surprised."

"Does everyone understand the plan?" Hopper asks to the small crowd outside. They would have planned inside but there was just too damn many of them to all fit into the Byers' house. So here they are outside, all of them gathered around and making a plan to shut this door and to save Steve, because they have to. They have to get Steve back, and they will, no matter what it takes, reasons Billy. No matter what it takes. It's his turn to save him now.

"Steve is our first priority." Billy says in a tone that says, 'no argument.' One of the psychic kids, Jake, Billy thinks his name is tries to argue but Kali elbows him in the stomach and that idea is quickly squashed. Which is all well and good because if anyone threatens Steve they threaten Billy.

Hopper looks from Billy to Jake and then back again before saying, "Now that we're all in agreement, let's go."

"I miss her." Steve tells Billy honestly as he stares out the window from his spot on his bed. The blankets are curled around him and he holds a cup of hot coffee with extra milk and sugar that Billy got him. He refused to get out of bed this morning which is so unlike him. At first Billy was, truth be told a little selfish, thinking it was about him and doctor's appointment from yesterday when they found out about his 'head injury,' but no it's not. It's about someone else, someone more important to Steve. "Today's her birthday."

Steve takes a sip of his coffee and Billy close his eyes for a second longer as he realizes who Steve's talking about. "Your mom. It's her birthday."

"Yeah." Steve says softly before taking another sip of his drink.

"How did you guys normally celebrate it?"

"We didn't."

"What do you mean?" Billy asks as his stomach fills with nervous insects that buzz and flutter. He's never been good at this. This comforting and

talking about things thing, but its Steve, and he hates seeing him like this. It leaves his heart in a painful grip, far more noticeable than the insects in his stomach.

“She- She wasn’t around the last year or so, but when I was younger she would say that birthdays are days where we celebrate being here, being alive.” His last words tremble out of his lips, but then he’s talking again and it’s number than ever. “She’s not alive anymore.”

Billy can’t take it anymore. He grabs the coffee cup out of Steve’s hand and places it on the nightstand as Steve yelps in annoyance. Before he can get really worked up Billy is wrapped around him. His chest is at Steve’s back and his arms wrap around his stomach and chest, bringing him close. His face rests on the side of Steve’s and it’s warm. Billy is so warm. He’s never been a cuddler, Steve knows that and even though he hates not being able to cuddle often or much at all he accepts it because- because he’s Billy, but this, right now... It feels so good. Steve can’t help but relax against Billy’s chest and close his eyes as the comfort overwhelms him. The safety and contentment that fills him. He wishes he could always feel like this.

“Look. My mom has been dead for years and I honestly don’t know when her birthday is but if I did know- Actually I don’t know what I would do, but so what if she’s dead? She had a good life, she had you. You should celebrate that. Celebrate her life. Dead or alive that’s what she was getting at.” Billy says in his usual crass way but it’s a surprising comfort to Steve. It’s a clarity, an honesty that most would have sneaked passed with their ‘I’m sorrys’ and ‘we’re here for yous’.

“You think?” Steve asks as he rests his hands on Billy’s that’s settled on his chest.

“Yeah, ‘course. I’m always right.”

“And cocky.”

Billy huffs but doesn’t rebuke it, instead he takes hold of Steve’s hand and brings it up to his lips. He kisses his knuckles softly before saying, “Sure I am.”

“Ah, shit.” Says Alex, number three as they walk toward the edge of

the forest.

“What? What is it?” Dustin asks wildly. He and the other kids are supposed to wait at the edge of the forest with Jonathan and Joyce to catch any strangling Demogorgon’s. Not the most glamorous job but it’s better than the alternative, nothing, sitting at home and waiting for all of this shit to be over with. No way were any of the kids going to do, and the adults knew it too so they came up with this job. That way they know where they are and are out of the least amount of trouble they can be. Still, Joyce wanted more than anything for them to not be involved at all, but even she had to admit that, yeah, they would find a way to get here on their own and then who knows what would happen to them in that course of action.

“Fucking protective circle around the whole place.” Two supplies.

“So what does that mean for us?” Nancy asks for everyone as the fear and concern take hold.

“For you, nothing, for us though...” Three says with weary expression on his tanned face.

“What they’re trying to say is that for us we can’t get through. Not yet. We’d have to work at it and there’s no telling how long that will take.” Kali explains more candidly.

“But the rest of us can go in?” Billy asks. She nods her head and he nods his in return. “Great, then we’re going.”

“Woah, hold on.” Hopper says, his hand up to stop Billy from going in. “We can’t go in without them. It’s suicide.”

“Look, Steve’s in there, we have to find him.”

“I know son, but-”

Billy’s done trying to explain for argue about the importance of Steve’s life. These people just don’t seem to get it, all they care about is this door. Steve was right all those months ago, he doesn’t have any friends, but then Dustin is nodding his head in agreement and Max looks pretty pissed off at Hopper so maybe he’s not completely on his own with this.

“Billy’s right, we have to go in.” Nancy cuts in taking the neutral ground. “We all agreed that the sign point to tonight being the night where the door opens, and now that Steve’s identity as the person doing this has been revealed this thing will probably try now, right?”

“Plus the force field!” Chips in Dustin. “He knew we were coming!”

“Unlikely, Steve was the only spy but it does prove that the ritual thing is taking place. The force field is up to protect Steve while he does it.” Reasons Lucas.

“Alright, alright.” Hopper says cutting in-between them all. “We’ll go. And don’t even think about! You kids are staying here with Joyce and Jonathan. Nancy and Billy, you’re with me. The rest of you, come when you can, we’ll do our best until then.”

“Jim, no-” Joyce tries but she knows it’s useless, he’s right after all. This is it, and if Steve succeeds that thing that will come through will kill everyone. Jonathan made sure that everyone understood that.

“If you’re sure. We’ll do our best to be quick.” Kali says to them as the others nod in agreement, even if they aren’t happy about it. “But don’t be surprised if there are a few surprises when you get in there, tricks.”

“No, I won’t be the damnedest bit fucking surprised.” Billy answers as Kali says that last part to him, like she knows he might be more targeted because of his and Steve’s relationship. Jane already warned him about that if he’s being honest but even then he wasn’t surprised because... “This thing is too smart not take advantage of what it already knows.”

89. "I Won't Give up, Not Until I'm Holding You."

It's the determination and desperation that keeps Billy going through all of the horrible nightmarish things they see in that forest while trying to get to Steve. Billy's not really sure how the others go through it but they do. Him, Hopper, and Nancy, they all make it out to the other side. It might have had something to do with the psychic kids trying to break through, maybe they were able to lessen the effects and slow down the Demogorgon's, but Billy will never know, not now at least and he can't afford to think about it at this moment because Steve is here. He's right here in front of him and he has to focus on that, they all do, because they need him to come back. Billy needs him to. Billy needs him more than he's ever needed anything.

"Steve?" Billy as said man has his back turned from Billy. He faces the rock formation and is doing something. If Billy didn't know any better he would say that Steve's lost his marbles and is finger painting all over some rocks but Billy does no better and that is no finger paint, nor is that any finger paint. It's too dark and red, and the smell. It must be blood, it must. Billy would know that smell anywhere. He's smelt and seen enough blood in his lifetime to recognize it on instinct now, at this moment is no different.

The person- Steve's body freezes at the sound of his name and Billy's heart stops momentarily as a small bead of hope enters him. If he recognizes him, if he knows Billy's voice then maybe... Maybe he's not so far gone. Maybe they can get whatever it is controlling him to stop. They have to, right? After all, even though those psychic cousins of Jane's said they could get whatever it is that's making him kill out of him, well, they're not here right now, are they? They should be. Fuck. It felt like they were in that forest for hours. They should be here. Where are they?

"I'm almost done." Steve says without turning around but it's all wrong. It's not his voice, it's something else. Something deep and dark. It spits out the words in a rush and they drool, drip with something that has authority. Something old. Something very old. They can all feel it, but it's only Nancy who has heard those scared

words that Jonathan has uttered- has warned, so it's her who makes the first move. She doesn't see Steve the way that Billy does. No, to her he's already dead. All she's sees is a means to- not to be dramatic- but the end of the world they know. She's sees death and that's what she strikes out when she runs toward him with a knife in tow, having lost her rifle somewhere in the forest she now uses a back weapon. Good for Steve- and Billy, but bad for her. It's too slow, it leaves time for a defensive move.

"I don't think so." Steve says it very quickly, so much so that only Nancy hears it as he turns and pushes her. It should be a small shove from the looks of the exertion put into it by Steve but it's much more than that. She goes flying across the grassy floor and into a tree. She falls to the ground and blood oozes from somewhere in the back of her head. It sends a jolt through Billy and makes him freeze in horror at what Steve- what that thing did. He can't seem to move, to go toward her like he know he should. He can only stare at her pale face and listen as Hopper shoots his gun.

Billy flinches and turns quickly to see Hopper knocked over by a Demogorgon. It goes to take a bite but Steve makes 'sh' sort of sound and it stops. Hopper's safe, for now, even though he is completely unconscious. All the players are that are here aside from himself. It's that cold realization that he's all alone to do this that forces Billy to look up and meet Steve's eyes, but they're not his eyes anymore. They're whatever that thing is that's controlling him. They're crisscrossed in black vines and it's startling, but it is still Steve. He's still there somewhere, he must be, and Billy can still feel him. He knows he does. It's that same squeezing in his heart and affection that glows when things are good, maddening anger when they're not, and sometimes all at once; everything.

"Steve?" Billy repeats as he stares at those black vine eyes. He's looking at this thing but he's not talking to it, he's talking to him. To Steve. Wherever he is in there, he's talking to him and not this thing. He knows that Steve must hear him, somehow he must and can. "Steve?"

That thing smiles with Steve's mouth. "He's gone, William."

"Don't. Just don't."

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you. You can't stop me now. It's complete." That thing smiles wider and turns while raising Steve's arms toward the hieroglyphs that litter along the stone sculpture. It's only then that Billy sees it. Sees the body pinned up and bloody. It's sliced awfully and- Oh, God. Oh no. No. No. No. It can't be. It can't be *her*. It's not supposed to be her.

"What did you do?" Billy asks bewildered. If he knew anything about anything he might have said he had gone into shock.

"My host- Steve, it had to be someone he knew, you see. I'm bringing forth a parent of this world so he had to lose one to bring it about."

"She's not- She's..."

"The closest thing I could find on hand. His father wouldn't come and she was always so nice to him. Like a real mother. Even after her daughter and he broke up she was still nice to him. A parent, despite him not talking to her for a few weeks this summer. I guess that's my fault, but nobody is perfect. Nobody but them. The old ones. Can't you feel it? They're coming."

The ground starts to rumble just then and Billy's more scared than he's ever been, but he still can't get rid- or stop thinking about Steve. How Steve doesn't deserve any of this. How he needs to get that thing out so he can be okay. Let the others worry about these 'old ones' and- and Mrs. Wheeler's body. He'll take care of Steve. The last couple of days it seems like aside from him and Dustin he's the only one that will. Alright, maybe Maxine too.

"Steve!" Billy yells over the impending earthquake, or so that's how it seems.

That thing turns around to face Billy and smiles. "He's gone, William, I told you. He's gone."

Billy ignores it and focuses on Steve. He talks to him. "Steve, baby. I won't give up, not until I'm holding you. I won't, but you have to help me help you to get that thing out of you!"

That thing continues smiling. "He let me in, William, and even if he

pushes me out it's too late. They're coming."

"It's never too late!"

"Dustin!?"

90. "Don't Let Go Of My Hand."

It's all a whirl of color and horror and things that can't be seen by any sane, normal human eye. They come in like an army of ghosts as the ground shudders and groans. As the earth threatens to open, readies to open to let unspeakable creatures loose from a world that can't be seen- at least not yet- they come through. They come through the forest with weapons at the ready. Some that are human and others that come from the same place these 'old ones' come from. And they get to work almost immediately as does Billy.

"Steve!" Billy runs to him as Dustin tries to get there too but he's stopped by Demogorgon's as are the others. The psychic whatever's start closing the door that Steve- That the thing has opened although it seems impossible from what Billy observes in the few precious moments before everything changes.

He's not alone when he gets to Steve, Jane is there beside him. She has her hand out and her nose drops of blood as she holds him in place with something invisible to Billy. He's able to get close enough as that thing, using Steve's mouth snarls and growls at them both. Billy's not sure what he can do but it looks like Jane is doing most of the work. She uses one hand to hold him down and another to pull Steve apart. It looks like she is grabbing this thing out of him but then she slumps over and breathes heavily. Hopper races to get to her as Billy turns to Steve.

His eyes- God his eyes. They're not that thing anymore. They're Steve's. The black vines are gone. Jane must have done it. She must have got it out. Billy smiles and huffs out in victory as he grabs him and pulls him close, but Steve doesn't hug back. Billy pulls away confused and worried as he sees the same on Steve's face.

"Billy?" Steve asks breathless.

"Yeah, yeah it's me. I'm here, Steve. I'm here." Billy reassures as his hands rub up and down Steve's shoulders. One hand goes to his cheek but Steve pulls away. "What is it?"

"We got it!" Someone shouts and Billy looks up to see that all the

psychics have formed a half circle around him and Steve. No. Not him and Steve- the doorway.

“Jesus.” Billy whispers as he looks behind Steve to where it is.

“Billy.” Steve whispers, dragging Billy’s attention back down to him.

“We have to get out of the way.” Billy tells him as he grabs hold of his arm and lifts him to his feet. “Come on!”

But Steve won’t move. He digs his heels in and there’s a look on his face worth seven lifetimes of sadness. “I can’t.” He says quietly. “It’s in me, Billy, It’s never going to come out. I know it. You know it. They know it.”

Billy turns to look at the psychics who all have a strenuous and determined expression on their faces as they hold tight of the door, trying to close it forever, but they can’t. They can’t close it without being sure that all dangers are behind it and they aren’t. Not yet anyway.

“No. No, fuck no. They can get it out of you. You seem fine now-you’re-” Billy says it all in a rush but is stopped short as Steve’s lips meet his.

“Don’t let go of my hand.” Steve whispers to Billy as he pulls away.

“I won’t.” Billy promises as he tightens his grip around the hand Steve grabbed onto his own. “We don’t have time to argue this. So if you’re hell bent on going there, I’m going with you. This thing inside of you though- they can get it out, they told me, right?”

He turns to the psychics for conformation but before he can see it he’s lifted off of his feet and everything turns dark.

“Don’t forget the popcorn!” Steve yells to Billy who turns to him with an annoyed expression.

“One time, Steve.” Billy says to him and Steve laughs. “Anyway I never forget the beer which is the important thing.”

“Whatever!”

They're both smiling at each other and Billy can't help but lean in and kiss Steve with fever as his heart threatens to bubble up and burst with something much stronger than affection.

"What was that for?" Steve asks as Billy pulls away.

"Nothing. Felt like doing it." Billy explains but Steve knows there's more to it. He doesn't say it all in words though, they never needed much words to communicate. So instead he simply says, "Me too."

"Are you sure you're not coming, son?" Hopper asks as Billy leans against the front door of the Harrington home.

"I'm sure. I- I can't." Billy answers. He doesn't need to see him. To see his- "I can't I have some boxes to sort through before his dad gets here."

"Right." Hopper says and it seems like that's going to be the end of it as he turns back toward the outside where the sun shines particular bright today, but then he's turning back. Back to the house, and back to Billy and his grief. "It can wait."

"No, it can't."

"Damn." Billy hisses in pain as he hits his toe against the last step to the basement a few hours after Hopper stopped by. He has the last box in his arms and is bringing it down to go with the others. They never should have brought them out in the first place and Billy knows that Mr. Harrington will not want to see it. Especially not after he's lost- Not now. He won't want to see it now. "Jesus."

Billy walks over, hopping slightly from the soreness of it before he stops at the pile of boxes on the far corner. He places the one in his arms on top and slaps his hands together to remove as much dust as possible. Even though they took out these boxes not too long ago, they're still dusty, but then again maybe it's because they both suck at clean. Well, he still does but S- he doesn't. He doesn't have anything. He's not here. He's...

"Better go make lunch." Billy says to himself, still too used to not being alone to say it in his head. He got so used to having someone

around he completely forgot the first seventeen years without someone- without him. Billy quickly shakes his head away from those thoughts and makes his way up the stairs. He shuts the door behind him very slowly and heads to the kitchen. He doesn't look back, why should he? But if he did, if he just stayed for a few more minutes he would see the record falling from the box unnaturally so and landing with a thud onto the ground. He would see the record sliding out, and he would see which record it is, and he would *know*.

'Suzie Q – Credence Clearwater.' It reads in the seemingly empty room.

But when has life ever been so kind?

Notes for the Chapter:

THE END.

Thank you. Thank you to everyone who has read, commented, left kudos, and everything else. You all kept me going on this journey, and I'd like to thank you all for that and for accompanying me on it.

I know that this is a sad ending but when do things ever really end?

<3